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ABSTRACT

This report details studies by eight researchers from five countries--Australia, Chile, the Czech Republic, Portugal, and Spain--that examine boundary-crossing issues between teachers and parents, between policies and school reality, between cultures, and between research and practice. All of the studies were based in elementary schools and involved collaboration among university or research organizations and schools. The study's objectives were: to identify the commonalities and differences of approaches and results in five countries seeking to increase family involvement in school; (2) to learn what works, what doesn't, and under what conditions; (3) to explore the use of different approaches to participatory, or "action," research; and (4) to stimulate further multi-national studies and projects through the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning International Network. The chapters are: (1) "Introduction" (D. Davies and V. Johnson); (2) "Perspectives on Action Research Methodology and the Seven Case Studies" (S. Stoer); (3) "Family-School Partnerships in Three Portuguese Schools" (R. Marques and others); (4) "Parent Involvement in Schools in Spain: A Case Study" (R. Gonzalez); (5) "Building School-Family-Community Partnerships in the Process of Social Transition in the Czech Republic" (E. Walterova); (6) "Schools Reaching Out: An Australian Case Study" (D. Toomey); (7) "Project 'Educando Juntos'--Family and School Educating Together" (B. Icaza); and (8) "Perspectives across Seven Case Studies" (V. Johnson and D. Davies);. The case studies show that, although boundaries between home and school are difficult to cross, a multicultural mix of parents, teachers, principals, and researcher-facilitators can be successful. The report also gives recommendations for resource allocation, policy support, administrative support, action teams, and networking among projects. Each chapter contains references. (BGC)

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CENTER ON FAMILIES,
COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS
& CHILDREN'S LEARNING

CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Multi-National Action Research on Family-School Collaboration

Edited by Don Davies and Vivian Johnson

Report No. 33 / January 1996

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CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Multi-National Action Research on Family-School Collaboration

Edited by Don Davies and Vivian Johnson

with
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CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & CHILDREN'S LEARNING

The nation's schools must do more to improve the education of all children, but schools cannot do this alone. More will be accomplished if families and communities work with children, with each other, and with schools to promote successful students.

The mission of this Center is to conduct research, evaluations, policy analyses, and dissemination to produce new and useful knowledge about how families, schools, and communities influence student motivation, learning, and development. A second important goal is to improve the connections between and among these major social institutions.

Two research programs guide the Center's work: the Program on the Early Years of Childhood, covering children aged 0-10 through the elementary grades; and the Program on the Years of Early and Late Adolescence, covering youngsters aged 11-19 through the middle and high school grades.

Research on family, school, and community connections must be conducted to understand more about all children and all families, not just those who are economically and educationally advantaged or already connected to school and community resources. The Center's projects pay particular attention to the diversity of family cultures and backgrounds and to the diversity in family, school, and community practices that support families in helping children succeed across the years of childhood and adolescence. Projects also examine policies at the federal, state, and local levels that produce effective partnerships.

A third program of Institutional Activities includes a wide range of dissemination projects to extend the Center's national leadership. The Center's work will yield new information, practices, and policies to promote partnerships among families, communities, and schools to benefit children's learning.

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ABSTRACT

This report describes studies by eight researchers from five countries -- Australia, Chile, the Czech Republic, Portugal, and Spain -- that examine common boundary-crossing issues -- between teachers and parents, between policies and school reality, between cultures, and between research and practice.

All of the researchers are members of the International Network of Scholars on Family, Community, School Partnerships, which was organized in 1990 by the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning (Center on Families).

At least 75 school principals, teachers, and parents were involved in school teams in the eight different school sites. All of the studies were based in elementary schools and involved continuing collaboration with a university or research organization and one or two schools. The survey instruments included a questionnaire on family and teacher attitudes and behavior, and a measure of school climate. A wide variety of interventions were tried and studied.

The study's objectives were: 1) to identify the commonalities and differences of approaches and results in schools in five countries seeking to increase family involvement in the school; 2) to learn what works, what doesn't, and under what conditions; 3) to explore the use of different approaches to participatory, or *action*, research; and 4) to stimulate further multi-national studies and projects through the Center's International Network. In addition, there were local purposes in each project that are specified in each case study. No two approaches to the studies were the same.

Certain behavior patterns consistently emerged that created and/or sustained barriers to partnership. All of the studies revealed the constraints of tradition in teacher-parent relationships due to 1) the force of traditional beliefs, 2) fear of the unknown, and 3) lack of knowledge of how parents might become involved in schools. Teacher resistance was a major finding across these multi-national studies. The case studies show that, although the boundaries between home and school are difficult to cross, the multi-cultural mix of parents, teachers, principals, and researcher-facilitators can provide an intercultural process that produces positive outcomes.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

by Don Davies and Vivian Johnson

When parents seek to influence their child's schooling, they cross a boundary into the teacher's professional world.

When teachers tell parents how they can help their children better, they cross into the family's sphere.

When researchers enter schools to study or advise, they move across a seldom-crossed boundary.

When educators and researchers from one country seek a common ground of theory, methodology, and inquiry with their counterparts in other countries, they cross many national and cultural boundaries.

All of these kinds of boundary crossings are described and analyzed in the studies by eight researchers from five countries that are reported in the pages which follow. All researchers are members of the International Network of Scholars on Family, Community, School Partnerships, which was organized in 1990 by the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning (Center on Families).

The principal authors of these cases are from five countries: Australia, Chile, the Czech Republic, Portugal, and Spain. They are Bernadita Icaza, Center for the Investigation and Development of Education (CIDE), Santiago, Chile; Raquel-Amaya Martinez Gonzalez, University of Oviedo, Spain; Ramiro Marques. Escola Superior de Educacao de Santarem, Portugal; Pedro Silva and Ricardo Vieira, Escola Superior de Educacao de Leiria, Portugal; Derek Toomey, LaTrobe University, Melbourne, Australia; Adelina Villas-Boas, University of Lisbon, Portugal; and Eliška Walterová, Charles University, Prague, the Czech Republic.

In addition at least 75 school principals, teachers, and parents were involved in school teams in the eight different school sites.

Background of the Study

In 1987 and 1988 Don Davies conducted a small study for the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) in Liverpool, England; several towns in Portugal; and Boston in the USA. The study yielded new insights about both the benefits of and barriers to new kinds of partnerships among schools, families, and communities aimed at increasing the chances of academic success of children, especially those from economically poor homes and communities. The study found important differences in the three countries based on culture, politics, and tradition, but there were an astonishing number of similarities in the results, as well as many common problems and useful practical ideas for solutions -- such as Liverpool's parent centers -- that could be adapted across national boundaries.

One idea from the three-country study shone especially brightly: If schools are to help to break the link between school failure and poverty and social class, teachers and administrators must do much more systematic, imaginative, positive, and comprehensive "reaching" toward the families and communities they serve, especially to those families they label "hard-to-reach."

The League of Schools Reaching Out

The idea that schools might improve their efforts to connect with "hard-to-reach" families motivated IRE to initiate a pilot project called "Schools Reaching Out" in two schools, one in Boston and one in New York. We worked with school teams to test out some of the ideas and strategies that grew out of the three-country study, including parent centers, home visitors, and parent-teacher action research. The school teams that planned and implemented these strategies (and evaluated the results) included parents, teachers, administrators, other school staff, and representatives of community agencies or institutions.

We learned that if collaboratively planned interventions are implemented faithfully, positive results often occur -- increased student achievement, better attendance, more parents devoting time to their children's education at home, increased participation by parents in activities designed to help the school, more involvement of community agencies in helping the school's families and children. We also learned that achieving such results is not easy and takes much time and energy. Partnership interventions are not a "magic bullet."

After two years this pilot was expanded into a national program -- the League of Schools Reaching Out, a network of 85 schools in about 25 states. The schools were designing and testing strategies to increase student achievement through a variety of specific strategies of collaboration with families and communities.

During this same period, IRE expanded its international program with a variety of projects, including a collaboration with a newly-formed counterpart organization in Portugal, Instituto para a educacao participada (IPEP). The leaders of IPEP were, for the most part, people who had been involved in IRE's three-country study in 1987.

The Center on Families

As the League developed, IRE became a part of a consortium of six universities which created the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning (Center on Families), an organization devoted to research and development and funded from 1990-1996 by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement and (in 1990-91) the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The Center on Families initiated an International Network of Scholars working in the area of family-school-community relationships and, with IRE, sponsored a series of Roundtable conferences for researchers from about 30 countries as forums for cross-national discussion of research and demonstration projects and policy issues. The Network now includes nearly 400 researchers from more than forty countries, representing every continent.

The idea of collaborative projects or cross-national studies was suggested by members of the International Network and a multi-national study was planned and then launched in 1992. The study was parallel to a somewhat similar project in eight schools in seven locations across the United States which participated in the Center on Families' Parent-Teacher Action Research project (1991-1994). This project used various forms of action research methodology as tools for school improvement. Two reports about this study are available from the Center on Families' distribution unit at Johns Hopkins University (Davies, Palanki, and Burch 1993; Palanki and Burch with Davies, 1995).

The schools in the multi-national study and in the action research project in the USA became members of the League of Schools Reaching Out. Hence, they received a common flow of ideas, materials, and services -- including all of the Center on Families' dozens of research reports, newsletters, and other publications about strategies being tried in the member schools.

We believe that this is the first multi-national action research study on this topic and one of the first cross-national research efforts that has substantially involved school administrators, teachers, and parents in all of its aspects.

Why a Multi-National Study?

Many of those involved with IRE, the Center on Families, and the International Network think of themselves as a part of a broad, international movement which sees family-community-school partnerships as centrally important to educational and social change. Improved opportunities for social and academic success for all children are the primary goals. For several reasons we think that the multi-national study will help to advance this broad agenda for change.

Action Research as a Tool for Encouraging Cross-Cultural Exchange

Research and action are significant parts of the agenda in this movement. We believe that to be most useful, the research agenda should be inclusive, tapping the work of researchers from many parts of the world in a wide range of disciplines, using diverse frameworks and methods, and working in a variety of settings. Exchanging ideas through publications and international forums such as the Center's International Roundtables is a good way to make the research agenda more inclusive. But, collaborative work in a cross-national study adds another useful dimension.

Demonstrating that Parent Involvement Works in Culturally Diverse Settings

Demonstration projects are an important means of advancing an agenda which includes both research and action. As Graham Room (1986) has pointed out, action-research projects "offer small scale demonstrations of alternative forms of social intervention which give practical plausibility and credibility to new paradigms of policy and professional practice."

Careful evaluation of demonstrations such as those involved in our multi-national project provides both practitioners and policy-makers with "material" -- building blocks -- for changing practice or policy. If the systematic evaluation of demonstration projects can occur in multiple and diverse settings -- including multi-national settings -- the nature of the "material" available for thinking about change is obviously enriched.

Experimentation and innovation are inspired by example. As Room (1986) points out to those interested in social or educational change, there are few really "new" ideas. Changes in policies or practices are rarely produced from thin air or from virgin blocks of stone but rather are applications of theories and adaptations of ideas molded in new ways but rooted in the experience of others. Experimentation and innovation in the family-community-school partnership arena will be encouraged by the existence of good examples in a wide variety of contexts, including examples from more than one country.

Much cross-national borrowing has occurred in recent years. Two examples: in the 1960s American educators borrowed heavily from examples in England as they developed experienced-based, open classrooms; and in the 1980s examples from Germany played a key role in developing proposals for school-to-work apprenticeship programs, which have been adapted in Federal legislation in the United States.

Experience and examples in other countries are useful to those in the U.S. who are seeking changes in policies or in institutional practice. This is what we call the "more distant mirror" phenomenon. Looking at our problems and alternative solutions to them at a distance gives policymakers different ways of thinking about the close-to-home problems and provides useful support for taking the political risks needed to make changes.

Some anthropologists who have studied the process of cultural change point out that "diffusion does not typically involve the replication in one society of some practice developed elsewhere; rather what is transposed is the basic idea, a model -- one might even say a metaphor -- which is then applied to the particular circumstances of the receiving society" (Renfrew, 1976, in Room, 1986, p. 10).

Providing Ideas for Practitioners, Policymakers, and Researchers

The researchers hope that the study, as reported in this book, will provide useful guidance on both the practical and policy fronts to policy makers, educators, and citizens who are interested in encouraging more positive relationships between schools, families, and communities as a part of broader efforts to improve education. They also hope that the project will be useful to post-secondary institutions and research or policy organizations which are interested in collaborating with schools.

Multi-National School Reform Interest

In the United States and in the rest of the developed world, school reform is high on the agenda of policymakers. There is wide agreement that improving the productivity and effectiveness of schools is a necessary part of a nation's economic development and its ability to cope with the strains of social and political change.

Accompanying this world-wide surge of interest in school reform is a greatly increased interest in the roles that families can and should play in educational reform. In scores of countries policymakers have included various forms of collaboration among school, family, and community as a part of their educational reform programs. Most of the cases which follow point to new laws and commitments by national or regional governments.

The surge of interest in collaboration or partnership is due in part to a convincing body of research that links various forms of parent involvement to improved student achievement and better student attendance, behavior, and social success. Some of the articles here add to that body of research.

In addition, more policymakers and educators in many countries seem to have decided that the public schools need the economic and political support of parents and the community in order to survive and flourish. More educational leaders have grasped the idea that collaboration between school, families, and communities can contribute to gaining this support. Many school leaders understand that the participation of parents -- across lines of race, social class, religion, political ideology, and gender -- can be a useful antidote to the divisive forces that are threatening the stability of school systems in some places.

More policymakers and educators have also decided that the multiple problems that families and communities face can't be solved by the schools or any single institution alone, or by families by themselves. They realize that combined and collaborative planning and action are needed.

Overview of the Five Nation Study

Funding

There were multiple sources of financial support: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement; grants to the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) from the Charles T. and Catherine D. MacArthur Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and the Pew Charitable Trusts; and the participating institutions in the five countries. Each project received a small discretionary grant from IRE of $1,000 to $4,000 for activities in the schools and some travel costs.

Conceptual Framework

The researchers have drawn in varying degrees on two theoretical perspectives developed by Joyce Epstein, Co-Director of the Center on Families. The first is a perspective that the inter-institutional connections of the school, family, and community are a set of overlapping spheres of influence on children's learning and development. This model recognizes that there are some practices of schools, families, and community agencies and organizations that are conducted separately and other practices that are conducted jointly.

Theoretical perspectives have traditionally emphasized the separateness or embeddedness of institutions which affect children. "Overlap" allows the boundaries between and among institutions which make investments in students to be more open. Research has shown that the ways we arrange important environments affects the outcomes and learning and development of students (Epstein, 1990).

A second perspective comes from the Center on Families's six-part typology to categorize the connections between families and communities and schools:

1) Basic families obligations for child-rearing, building positive home conditions that support children's development; 2) Basic obligations of schools for communicating about school programs and children's progress; 3) Family involvement at school as volunteers, aides, audiences for student performances, participants in meetings and social events; 4) Involvement in learning activities at home, monitoring and assisting children; 5) Involvement in governance, decision-making and advocacy in school-based organizations and in the community; 6) Collaboration and exchanges between the school and other community organizations, agencies, and institutions.

The Center on Families' use of the overlapping spheres of influence and the six-part typology is designed to encourage methodologically diverse research which examines the effects of specific connections between families, communities, and schools within multiple environments. This diversity is reflected in these pages.

Some Terminology

Some of the researchers adopted the term partnerships, in place of parent involvement, to signal a broader range of relationships among schools, families, and communities and a difference in intent as well. Partnership implies an effort toward equality and sharing of authority, responsibility, and resources on a continuing basis instead of a series of events or activities which schools do for parents. For our purposes, the terms partnership and collaboration are used interchangeably -- both meaning agreements between two or more parties or institutions about mutually agreed-on objectives, authority, responsibilities, and accountability.

The inclusion of communities is also a departure from the tradition of looking at a two-way relationship between schools and parents. By community, IRE and the Center on Families refer to social service and health agencies; institutions such as churches, libraries, hospitals, and local governments; businesses and other employers; civic and community organizations; and the individuals who reside in the areas served by the school.

The term *family* is also used in some of the cases instead of *parents* to signal the number of people in addition to biological parents who may be responsible for children's development -- for example, grandparents, siblings, and aunts and uncles.

Study Objectives

The study's objectives were distinctly practical.

1) To identify the commonalities and differences of approaches and results in schools in five countries seeking to increase family involvement in the school.

2) To learn what works, what doesn't, and under what conditions.

3) To explore the use of different approaches to participatory, or *action*, research.

4) To stimulate further multi-national studies and projects through the Center's International Network.

In addition to these objectives, there were local purposes in each project that are specified in each case study.

Action Research

While we use the term "action research" for the study overall, there was no model of "action" or "participatory" research proposed to or required of all of the researchers. The researchers participated in the multi-national study because of their interest in the topic, not primarily because of their interest in or experience with the various approaches to action research. In most cases the authors had not been previously involved with action research and considered their efforts in this study to be exploratory.

No two approaches to the studies were the same. In only two of the seven studies -- those organized by Martínez González in Spain and Walterová in the Czech Republic -- were teams of both teachers and parents formed to plan the work, choose interventions, and study the results. In the Spanish study, students were also included in the team. The team organized by Marques in Entroncamento included only teachers, the school head, and the researcher, even though parents were involved in all of the activities. In Leiria, Silva and Vieira functioned as initiators and participant-observers, working with parents and teachers, although there was no formal research team.

In Chile, the project was conducted in the spirit of participatory research, drawing on that country's interest in Paulo Friere, with the plans and interventions based on the assessment of the needs and interests of the parents and teachers. But the staff of the sponsoring research organization conducted the research itself.

The study in Lisbon had a more traditional experimental design. The research team was composed of the researcher and some of her university graduate students who visited parents' homes and worked with them on a literacy project. The study was conducted by the researcher, with the assistance of the graduate students. Similarly, the Australian study was "managed from the outside," by the researcher, aided by his graduate students who were experienced teachers. The teachers visited the parents' homes to assist with Paired Reading.

This diversity may be considered both a limitation and a strength. The authors do not provide any extended discussion of either the theory or methodology of action research. For this reason the discussion offered by Stephen R. Stoer in Chapter 2 fills a need in this report. He provides a useful perspective on action research, offering a much more theoretical context for it than is provided in the cases themselves.

Common Elements

There were a few common elements in the seven studies:

1) All were based in elementary schools and involved continuing collaboration with a university or research organization and one or two schools;

2) At least one intervention was made to promote family or community partnerships with careful documentation of effects of the intervention on one or more of the following outcomes: parent and teacher attitudes and behavior, school climate, and children's learning.

3) Three survey instruments proposed by the principal investigators were used at the outset in all of the studies. We asked each project to consider administering these instruments to provide some common base-line data near the beginning of each project. The instruments included a questionnaire on family and teacher attitudes and behavior, and a measure of school climate. The survey instruments were developed at the University of Minnesota and were used in several of the seven projects in the Center's Parent-Teacher Action Research Project in the United States.

This well-intentioned plan turned out to be one of the weakest and least useful aspects of the multi-national effort. Starting points for the projects were at different times. (Two schools were in the Southern Hemisphere.) In four of the countries the instruments had to be translated from English, which in some cases took a great deal of time. In nearly every case the instruments had to be adjusted for cultural differences. In several cases the teachers and parents in the schools were resistant to or confused by this data-gathering attempt. The differential application of the instruments means that there was no possibility of using the results for cross-site analysis. And, in only two cases -- Martínez González in Spain and Villas-Boas in Portugal -- were the results from these survey instruments actually useful to the study.

Procedures

The outside researcher(s) or facilitator(s) approached the school to determine their interest and capacity and enlist their participation. In all cases the support of the school head and teachers was sought and obtained.

All of the researchers from eight sites met with the principal investigators in Portugal in November 1994 at the conclusion of the field work to discuss their findings and agree on common themes. They were joined by sociologist Stephen Stoer from the University of Porto in Portugal, who served informally as an adviser and critic. (See Chapter 2.)

Interventions

A wide variety of interventions were tried and studied, including home visitors to work with parents and children on reading skills; parent centers; newsletters and parent-teacher conferences; festivals and other social events; after-school instructional and recreational programs for children conducted by parents; diary exchanges between parents and teachers; training in study skills for students; written teacher-parent-child agreements; the development of a school foundation; initiation of health services for children; an organized parent education program for low-income parents of young children; the implementing of a parent training program developed in the U.S.; and Open Doors Days to welcome parents to visit classrooms.

Some Common Themes and Issues

Many common themes and issues can be found in the case study chapters. We will comment here on just four of the boundary-crossing themes.

Boundaries between Teachers and Parents

The reluctance and resistance of teachers to inviting parents into fuller partnerships appears to be universal. Several sources of this problem are identified: tradition, threats to professional expertise, lack of adequate preparation in pre-service or in-service education, and lack of structures and mechanisms to bring teachers and parents together in non-threatening settings.

There are many examples offered where parents are reluctant to cross the school boundary to participate. Some parents establish their own boundaries because of memories of their own unpleasant school experiences and the reality that calls from the school usually mean trouble.

Good examples are to be found of successful efforts to span this boundary. Parent-teacher action research is a theme in two of the cases.

Boundaries between Policies and School Reality

Many new national and regional government policies to promote parent-school connections are cited. Examples are found in Chile, the Czech Republic, Portugal, and Spain. Many of these policies are producing responses in schools and communities. But a few of the cases also point to serious gaps between national or regional policies and school realities (Chile, Spain, Portugal). The crossing of barriers as envisioned by policymakers often breaks down and fails to happen in the reality of local schools and communities, where some of the other boundaries discussed here remain hard to cross. As Martínez González puts it: "It takes a long time. Creating partnerships is hard work. Many participants don't think the time and energy will be justified by the results."

Boundaries between Cultures

The importance of cultural differences is highlighted in several studies. Both Adelina Villas-Boas and Derek Toomey use a family literacy training approach to try to bridge class and cultural differences between the school and parts of the community.

Another kind of cultural boundary is represented by the multi-national study itself, in which researchers from the USA and five other countries worked to construct a cohesive plan and carry out a multi-site study. An example of cross-site difficulties was the inability to find questionnaire instruments that were culturally appropriate and useful in all of the sites.

The researchers themselves found that working on the project was a useful way to prevent national and cultural differences from becoming a hard-to-cross boundary.

Boundaries between Research and Practice

These boundaries are seen in different forms in the cases: the gap between school personnel and researchers and other academics; the gap between research and putting the results into practice; the boundaries within research communities between educators and other scholars. Some of the cases suggest useful boundary-spanning procedures.

We suggest to our readers that the crossing boundaries metaphor we began with actually will work very well as a frame for this entire report.

What's Ahead in this Report?

In the chapter which follows, Stephen R. Stoer of the University of Porto in Portugal discusses the difficulties and benefits of action research, drawing on his own experience with action research in Portugal. He also provides a commentary on the cases and a summary in chart form.

In Chapter 3 the reader will find three case studies from Portugal, with a brief introductory section by Ramiro Marques of the Escola Superior de Santarem to provide background information about current developments in that country.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 present the case studies from Spain, the Czech Republic, Australia, and Chile. Finally, in Chapter 8, Vivian Johnson and Don Davies examine the work across all of the sites, identify some common themes, and make several recommendations.

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Chapter 2

PERSPECTIVES ON ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THE SEVEN CASE STUDIES

by Stephen R. Stoer[1]

> *Through the Parent-Teacher Action Research project, we have sought to understand the impact of school-driven family-school-community partnerships on school policy. To what extent are schools' efforts at building stronger home-school-community partnerships being integrated into their overall efforts at reform? Our assumption is that stronger family and community involvement represents a comprehensive and integral strategy for transforming schools rather than an end-goal itself.*
>
> Palanki and Burch, 1995: 7

The seven studies which make up the core of this book were written mainly for the international research community in education. In most of the studies, this community was taken in its widest sense, that is, as including those teachers and educationalists who incorporate into their teaching a research component. This fact is coherent with the research methodology adopted in general by the project and in particular with regard to the studies where this methodology was most successfully and willingly employed.

It is not easy to combine research with teaching. Those who have tried, mainly through some form of action research methodology, have been accused of being both sociologically naive ("the actor must have the *power* to act") and reductive with regard to both action and research ("which involve two [different] modes of thinking and of acting").[2] The difficulties of combining research with teaching thus weigh upon the different contributions to this book in two ways, both of which are based upon the assumption, more often than not, that the already complex role of the teacher can be, without difficulty, woven into the demands of also being a researcher, with its own particular difficulties, constraints and problems. As a result, the *authors-as-teachers* of this book concern themselves mainly with the operationalization of findings, pragmatically presented as solutions to problems.[3] On the other hand, the *authors-as-researchers* tend to problematize and to raise general questions whose answers depend not only upon further research but also upon contextualizations that far outstrip the short-term aims of bringing things together.

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[2] In a critical vein, see Hammersley, 1993; in an attempt to overcome some of the difficulties involved, see Atkinson, 1994.

WHY INSIST ON ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY?

Action research methodology is crucial for promoting change in schools because of its capacity to influence in a reflexive way that which one may consider to be the heart of the educative process: the way teachers *re-present* knowledge to pupils.[4] In other words, action research in schools has the capacity to promote the production of knowledge about the different cultures present in the school and to see that there occurs a simultaneous investment of this knowledge in the way curricular knowledges are constructed in the classroom. By way of the critical reflection it stimulates, action research can lead to a questioning of the validity and interest of these same knowledges and make recognizable the degree of symbolic violence which their acquisition involves.

Various authors, above all those identified with a critical sociology of education, have emphasized the importance of recognizing that which is, in fact, a political choice (i.e., the way knowledge is reflected and constructed by teachers and students in the classroom). The capacity which action research has to influence this process of reflection and construction is found in its posture as "intentionally oriented towards the overcoming of binary oppositions, so dear to the rational (cartesian) and positivist model of knowledge" (Leite, Rocha and

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[3] The inclusion of parents in the studies reinforces this tendency.

[4] We are referring to action-research here as the model which guided the realization of the projects "Educação Inter/Multicultural" and "Educação e Diversidade Cultural: para uma sinergia de efeitos de investigação", between 1989 and 1994, through the *Centro de Investigação e Intervenção Educativas (CIIE)* of the Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação of the University of Oporto, Portugal. Some of the main references for this model were Goyette and Lessard-Hébert (1987); Pourtois (1981); Bataille (1981); Benavente, *et al.* (1990). The variation in the forms of development of the action-research model normally have to do with what constitutes *participation* and the degree of consolidation of the *collective researcher*.

Pacheco, 1992). In other words, action research develops through a process in which "committed" social agents interact both through knowledge and through action, thus enabling "the construction of knowledges that would not be possible in an external relationship with regard to the object under study" (Not, 1984: 110, cited in Leite, *et al.*, *ibid.*). One should also add that this capacity, as Cortesão (1992) points out, depends also on the critical posture of action research in attempting (1) to balance an awareness of the power of structural constraints with the importance of seeing events in their historical and social contexts, and (2) in admitting the existence of a relative autonomy on the periphery of the system which can allow for the management, even if limited, by schools and teachers of the decisions and activities to be undertaken.

Secondly, action research has the potential to develop partnerships between teacher-researchers in schools and researcher-teachers in higher education, and between teachers in schools and parents in the local community, because it takes as its starting point not only a position that defends the advantages of articulating different knowledges but also the importance of the relevance for practices of the knowledges produced. This relevance becomes the first criterion in justifying the production of knowledge, thus substituting what has been justifiably called the "ritualization of scientific production," with its "weak applicability in real contexts" and the "functionalization and outright refusal of local knowledges" (Benavente, 1992). The articulation of the different knowledges produced is guaranteed, in principle, by the development of the pedagogical device which, in turn, depends upon the successful consolidation of the "collective researcher." The precariousness and, at the same time, the richness of the development of the pedagogical device is underlined by Correia (1993: 42):

> *The pedagogical device is ... the hub of the production of precarious and unstable balances. On the one hand, it needs to manage an unstable balance established between the demands of the process of production of scientific knowledges embraced as critical of experiential knowledges and, at the same time, promote the revalorization of these same knowledges; on the other hand, it should facilitate the creation of a balance between the process of the appropriation of the instrumental competencies necessary for the development of investigative action and, simultaneously, the critical analysis of the instrumental character which this process attributes to such competencies. Finally, the pedagogical device has to manage the conflict which results from the fact that it is based on the development of projects of investigative action which tend to be self-managed while at the same time it recognizes the necessity of the intervention of educator-trainers.*

The consolidation of the "collective researcher" guarantees the efficacy of the articulation of knowledges. As can be gathered from the process of construction of the pedagogical device, the "collective researcher" takes time to develop. It is this development, over time, that constitutes its strength, both in terms of the articulations it produces and in terms of its presence, consistent and responsive, in schools. It is also through this development that the three components of action-research are carried out: research activities, intervention, and the continuing education of those involved in the process.

READING THE CASE STUDIES

On the basis of the seven case studies presented in this book, including countries from the three continents of Australia, Latin America and Europe, I have constructed a chart (Table 1) which will serve to point out some of the themes, similarities, and differences of these studies with regard to their results and to the processes of change inherent to the various settings. My comments on the content of the chart are based mainly on what the authors of the studies have written in their articles.

Insert Table 1 here

It is interesting to note that in six of the seven studies, the exception being Australia, the national context involves the adjustment of education and social policy to the reestablishment in these countries of representative democracy. In some of these cases, non-democratic authoritarian regimes had been in power for as long as almost half a century.

In addition, in all of the countries, including Australia, major socio-economic restructuring took place during the 1980s. In all cases this restructuring took the form of adjustment to new world conditions provided, in large part, by the increasing importance of the phenomenon of globalization (and its dialectical counterpart localization), by qualitative changes in the work process of the capitalist economy, and by increasing awareness of ecological imbalances eventually capable of threatening the very existence of the planet.

Given both the national and international contexts of the studies, it is not surprising to find that educational reform is a constant in all the countries involved (including once again Australia, where Toomey's reference to "demoralizing change" captures what many educationalists have felt in their field of activity due to the "economic rationalization" process).[5]

All but one of the studies were carried out in public schools, the exception being *Rumo ao Futuro* in Entroncamento. The conditions apparently resulting from the private-Catholic nature of this school jar considerably with the other presentations. This fact may account for the relative ease with which its author applied the Institute of Responsive Education's model. The fact that two of the Portuguese schools were semi-rural/semi-urban in their context, different from the urban context of all the others, may be significant. Certainly with regard to the Leiria study, the emphasis put on the comparison of school culture and local culture would point to the eventual clash between "school-driven family-school-community partnerships" in a setting where oral culture might still be dominant locally.

With regard to the main research questions, cases in Australia and Lisbon, Portugal stand out immediately (and do so for the rest of the chart) as two cases somewhat apart from the rest. This has to do mainly with the research methodology used in these two cases, which was much more classical-experimental, and only approximated the action-research model to the very slightest degree (perhaps a bit more so in the Lisbon case due to involvement with the families during the research). In all the other cases, the main preoccupation was, as expected, how to promote partnerships between schools, families and the community. The different approaches to this question varied from one extreme, which forthrightly proposed changing schools, to another, which suggested that basic knowledge was needed particularly with regard to family strategies towards schooling.

As stated above, with the exception of the Australian and Lisbon cases, the studies proposed action research as their methodology. Once again, in some cases the approach was more hesitant, clearly emphasizing the precariousness of the first stages of this model and the need to develop it over time, while others were more affirmative and took things more for granted.

Intervention clearly took on two distinct forms within the different studies: in several case studies concrete measures were enacted, such as the "creation of a family center"

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[5] In some countries this process has been referred to as "modernization," even when the process itself puts at risk the very promises of the modernization process.

(Encontramento), "home visits" (Lisbon), and the "creation of a school journal" (Leiria); in case studies in Spain, the Czech Republic, and Chile, the emphasis was placed on strategies of intervention that included "assessment of needs" ("diagnosis"), the recognition of competencies acquired, the "interpretation, evaluation and comparison of data" and considerations of the relationship between the promotion of teacher-parent partnerships at the local level and their promotion through national education policy.

A synopsis of the results of the different case studies shows the following:

1. The need for ongoing action research in the schools in order to consolidate the "collective researcher;"

2. The importance of teacher-parent partnerships in decentering the school's code (Bernstein) or culture (Bourdieu) in order to (a) in the case of the Czech study, produce a portrait of the "non-aggressive school," (b) in the case of Leiria, produce knowledge of cultures that may contribute to success at school, and (c) in the cases of Santiago and Lisbon, improve pedagogy in the home;

3. The fact that teachers, as part of national administration, largely identify themselves with a principle of equality of educational opportunity which guides their practices on the basis of a rational orientation that insists on assessing competencies acquired and not on different (i.e. local) social and individual characteristics (in this sense, they tend to be "monocultural" in the classroom).

Finally, with regard to lessons learned and recommendations for future work, the studies show, once again, how important the factor of time is. They also stress the importance of respect for spheres of competencies, where the fundamental role of the partnership is to articulate these spheres and not, by any means, reduce them to the logic of any one sphere.

Interestingly, there is emphasis placed on trust, collaboration, and reciprocity. In an age of "detraditionalization," as it is termed by Giddens (1990), this emphasis must be crucial, for trust no longer is based on "invisible" structures: it has now become reflexive. This fact opens up new possibilities for articulation, while at the same time it makes relationships more precarious in the sense that they have to be constantly renewed. Thus, networks arise to facilitate this task and to provide continuity. All the case studies, *in a sense as a result of their very existence*, are aware of the implications of this new reflexivity.

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Table 1
Multi-National Parent-Teacher Action Research Case Studies

National Context	Leiria, Portugal: European Union; transition dictator democracy	Entroncamento, Portugal: European Union; transition dictatorship democracy	Lisbon, Portugal: European Union; transition dictatorship democracy	Gijon, Spain: European Union; transition dictatorship democracy	Prague, Czeck Republic: economic and political pluralism; privatization; "velvet revolution"	Victoria, Australia: economic recession, economic rationalism	Santiago, Chile: in a period involving the reestablishment of democracy
Policy Context	Educational Reform	Educational Reform	Educational Reform	Educational Reform	Educational Reform	"Demoralizing change"	Emphasis on "quality of education"; "modernization" of the education system
School Context	*Pinhal do Rei* semi-rural public	*Rumo ao Futuro* semi-urban-private Catholic	*Primary School 1001* urban-mixed-public	*Laviada* (8 years) urban-public (813 pupils)	*Red Hill Basic School* urban-public (650 pupils)	*Woodvale Primary* urban-public disadvantaged	*Los Almendros and Republica Dominicana* urban-mixed-public
Main Research Questions	Identify family strategies with regard to schooling	To change schools so that they can establish partnerships with families and community	Will literacy development with minority parents promote reading?	Parent-teacher partnership main characteristic of school?	Parents-school; teachers/profs/ parents: in period of transition?	"Paired reading" improves school success?	Comparative case studies (in two schools) of family-school relationship
Methodology	Participant observations in a climate of action-research	Primarily an action research approach	Experimental research	Constituting the action-research team	Action-research: simultaneous research methodology and action strategy	Volunteer teachers from university course -- applied research	Active and participatory research

Intervention	Legalization of Parents Association Creation of school journal "Letrinhas"	Creation of a family center Open telephone line After-school program	Workshops with parents Home visits Small trips	First year: assessment of needs Second year: answering the needs	"The Mirror Strategy" and "The Explorative Strategy" (92-93) "The Monitoring Strategy" and "The Tuning Strategy" (93-94)	External (22 families - 24 target children)	Diagnosis, reflections, interviews A consideration of national education policy
Synopsis of results/analysis of experience/outcomes	The relationship between the school and families is a relationship based on cultures--a relationship between the culture of the school and local cultures The school lives in permanent tension between forces of uniformity and diversity The comparison of different cultures makes cultural knowledge possible	Parents viewed the school as a territory of their own and a place where they have a voice	Significant differences between experimental and control groups (scores of former higher) Parents' self-assurance increased	Permanent research seminar at school: parents, teachers, students, university facilitator	Contrast between reality of school and parents' proposals which created ideal picture of the school: the "non-aggressive school" Teachers were the most complicated and varied group Best outcomes in lower grades The economic autonomy of the school allows the principal to differentiate teachers' financial rewards	Ten parents successfully completed, showed improved reading	Better communication between parents and teachers improves communication between adults and children

Lessons learned; recommendations	To help a child learn one needs to know the context on which s/he bases his/her understanding Schools as organizations need to rethink their relationship with families and communities	Emphasize the educational roles of parents Made a distinction between administrative roles and educational roles Introduce choice plans into Portuguese schools	Indian minority parents are not "hard to reach" Parent involvement in emergent literacy diminished the rate of failure Parents became more demanding	Dependence on facilitator Parent-teacher partnerships hard to create Feeling of isolation of the team shows the need to reach all of the school	Importance of creating trust between partners Importance of teachers as subjects, and not merely as objects of the research Importance of networks	"Involving parents should never be an excuss for not providing well-resourced schools"	Consolidation of independent action by schools takes time Collaborative work between teachers and parents helps to influence mutual acceptance

Chapter 3

FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS IN THREE PORTUGUESE SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

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The National Context

Portugal is one of the oldest countries in Europe. The surface area is 89,000 kilometers and the capital is Lisbon, a city of 1.5 million inhabitants.

The Portuguese family structure is changing rapidly, but it remains the most important small community in the country and is stable compared with families in other developed countries. The divorce rate is increasing, but it is still one of the lowest in Europe. The birthrate is very low: 1.5 children per woman. This low birthrate is explained in part by the high cost of housing compared to the low salaries of most workers. Portuguese salaries are about half of Spanish salaries and about one-third of French salaries.

Portugal used to be a monocultural and monolingual country, with ninety-seven percent white Europeans and only three percent Africans and Asians, most of them coming from former Portuguese colonies. In recent years, many newcomers from Asia, Africa and central and Eastern Europe have changed the monocultural pattern. The ethnic minorities are concentrated in big cities, like Lisbon and Setubal, and many work in house and motorway construction and other manual and domestic labor. Females represent fifty-two percent of the population, and almost half of them have jobs outside of their homes. Forty percent of children from three to six years old attend preschool education. Seventy percent of students finish ninth grade; fifty percent finish twelfth grade; and thirty-two percent of the 20-24 age group attend university or college.

There are fourteen public universities, sixteen public polytechnic institutes (similar to colleges), ten private universities, and six private polytechnic institutes. Half of all college students are enrolled in private institutions. In the last decade, the college attendance rate increased three times (up 12 percent in 1984, up 32 percent in 1994). Ninety percent of secondary students are enrolled in public schools.

Portugal has experienced many changes in the last two decades. Its once predominantly rural economy has changed to a tertiary one, with most of the workforce in services, transportation and commerce. This trend accelerated when Portugal become a part of the European Union (EU) in 1986. The political change from a dictatorial regime in 1973 allowed the country to be accepted as a member of the EU. The development of a stable, democratic political system and EU membership have spurred great social and economic changes. In 1994, the unemployment rate was 7.5 percent, but it is expected to decrease in 1995. There is one medical doctor per 353 persons; more than 98.4 percent of houses have electricity and 94.1 percent have water.

The political system is a democratic republic with a parliament, elected every four years, and a president with limited executive power, elected every five years. The legislative power belongs to the parliament, and the executive power belongs to a central administration selected by the party with voting control in the parliament. In the last ten years, the executive power has belonged to the Social Democratic Party, which is a centrist party with many supporters among middle-class and wealthy people.

As a member of the EU, Portugal has received a large amount of European money to build motorways, schools, university facilities, and more modern telecommunication systems. The Portuguese affiliation with the EU community has had many positive effects on schooling and education. Many new university campuses, scientific labs, and research centers have been built with European money. In order to join other European countries in the efforts to modernize and develop, Portugal has made important progress in increasing university enrollment and attendance and in creating vocational secondary schools. Even new elementary schools have been built with European money. More recently, European money financed the expansion of a national in-service teacher training program.

Article 126 of the Treaty on European Union (known as the Maastricht Treaty) is considered to be the start of more changes in education in Europe. All EU countries mandate some kind of parent involvement and support the idea that family is the first and most important structure in education. In some countries, like Denmark, the schools are run by a committee of parents. In most of them, the parents have representatives on the school boards. European research (Macbeth and Ravn, 1994) suggests that teachers do not want parent participation in the classroom and are suspicious of parent involvement in decision-making. Teachers expect parents to supervise homework and to help solve organizational problems concerning school and teaching: safety on the way to school, organization of parties, accompanying teachers on school trips, and donations and cake-making. Whenever there are learning difficulties and educational problems in the family or at the school, teachers tend to blame the parents, labeling the family "uninterested" or citing poverty or "lack of culture" (Davies et all, 1989; Davies, Marques and Silva, 1993).

The Educational System

Portugal spends 4.5 percent of its PNB (national product) on education. Looking at educational statistics, we can conclude that in spite of increasing educational supply -- the development of many new elementary and secondary schools across the country -- much more is needed if we want to match supply with demand. The educational system remains ineffective for low-income and minority students: thirty percent of students do not finish the ninth grade and fifty percent of students do not finish the twelfth grade. Most of the students who are failing belong to low-income families. We can conclude that the Portuguese educational system has some problems of inequity and inadequacy related to: 1) curricular adequacy for low-income and minority children; 2) links between schools and other community educational, health and cultural agencies; 3) funding after-school educational programs for low-income and minority children; and, 4) organizing tutorial and remedial educational programs for children with learning difficulties.

The educational system is highly centralized. There is a national curriculum, and the subject matter syllabi are imposed on every school, either public or private, by the Ministry of Education. The democratic revolution, in 1974, tried to reverse this trend in part. The principals, previously selected by the Ministry of Education, were replaced by a directive board elected by teachers. This model changed recently to a new model which gives parent representatives a voice in school boards and councils, the decision-making structures. Nevertheless, the Department of Education still regulates school curricula and subject matter syllabi. The school budget depends completely on the national budget and is defined each year by the Ministry of Education. Public schools do not have supplementary budget sources either from local businesses or from local governments.

Teachers are selected through a national competition and are hired by the Ministry of Education. The school board includes parents, local business associations, local cultural agencies, teachers and local government representatives, but neither the school head nor the school board has any voice in the process of selecting or promoting the faculty members.

Student evaluation procedures are imposed by the Department of Education through national regulations that mandate the same procedures to every school. The principal, the school board and the teachers are supposed to apply those regulations and procedures and can be held responsible by the Ministry in doing so. All teachers are supposed to accomplish the national syllabus but there is no way of monitoring their work except for the recommendations made by the pedagogical council, in which parents have representatives.

Parent Involvement: The Policy Context

The first official Portuguese document with specific references to parent involvement is the Portuguese Constitution (Constituicao da Republica Portuguesa), approved in 1976 by the parliament, two years after the democratic revolution. The constitution says that parents have the right and the duty to educate their children and mandates cooperation between state and families regarding education. Some months later, the central administration published an act about school administration (Decreto-Lei 769-A/76 de 23 de Outobro) that mandates parent participation in class councils (one parent representative whenever disciplinary problems are in the agenda). The first law about parents' associations was published in 1977 (Lei 7/77 de 1 de Fevereiro) and allows the creation of parents' associations in middle and high schools. In 1979, a new act (Despacho-Nomativo 122/79 de 1 de Juhno) mandated that the school committee (the board that administrates the school) have regular meetings with the parents' association and give the parents' association a seat on the school pedagogical board. A 1982 law (Decreto-Lei 125/82 de 22 de Abril) created the National Educational Board, a consulting organization with representatives from universities, teacher unions, education research centers, youth associations and parents' associations. In 1984 (Decreto-Lei 315/84 de 28 de Setembro), a new law allowed preschools and elementary schools to have parents' associations.

The Basic Law of Education (Lei 46/88 de 14 de Outubro) mandates parent participation in decision-making at the national and school levels. In 1989, the government approved the regulation of the schools' pedagogical board (Despacho 8/SERE/89 de 8 de

Fevereiro). With this new law, parents nor only have a seat on the pedagogical board but are also represented on the class council; the law also requires the class tutor (who has a role similar to a home room teacher or counselor) to devote one hour per week in his schedule to meet with parents. In 1990 (Depacho Conjunto 60/SERE/SEAM/90 de 14 de Setembro) the Department of Education published a guideline which gives parents the opportunity to choose schools whenever possible. Unfortunately, this law is not implemented in most schools.

Probably the most important law regarding parent involvement published in Portugal was the new system for the direction, management, and administration of the public schools (Decreto-Lei 172/91 de 10 de Maio). Parents were given two seats on the class council and the school board. Concerning evaluation procedures, parents received more rights and duties with the approval of the national student evaluation system. Teachers are supposed to inform parents of all aspects of student evaluation.

The new system was implemented on a pilot basis in the 1992-1993 school year in thirty schools. The new model is being expanded with the support of the Confederation of Parents' Associations (Confap), despite the opposition of some teacher unions.

Lack of parent involvement and their low participation in the decision-making process remains a reality (Afonso, 1933; Silva, 1995). The schools that experimented with the new model were still directed and administered by teachers with only few parents participating in decision-making.

Nevertheless, this system introduces some changes in the power-sharing pattern of schools by separating the management board from the administrative board. Direction of the school has now become the responsibility of a school board or council, which includes nine teachers, three students (only in secondary schools), one representative of the technical staff, two or three parents, one representative of the local government, another one representing the community's social and economic forces and a final representative of the community's cultural agencies. The executive director, responsible for the school's administration, is selected by the school board, by means of open competition for the post. Parents also have a voice on the pedagogical board, with two representatives. This council is in charge of education policy.

According to this new pattern, parents are obviously ascribed with new responsibilities, but in most schools those representatives are merely rhetoric, and teachers remain the only people with power in schools. In spite of low participation, about one half of all middle and secondary schools have parents' associations (Marques, 1989). However, parents' associations are usually run by a small number of middle-class parents. Without school choice plans and without autonomy, public schools remain totally dependent on central educational authorities that list all the priorities, select teachers and staff, deliver curriculum guidelines and set up the school budgets. Teacher unions and many teachers are suspicious of parent involvement and view it as a threat to autonomy and professionalism.

Evaluation of the System

Evaluation of the new model of direction and administration of schools has detected some problems related to system implementation. First, some schools adapt more easily to the system than others. Most elementary schools are located in isolated villages with less than thirty elementary school students and one or two teachers, and most teachers who wish to become principals do not have the expertise in school administration and public finances. The new model is implemented more easily in secondary schools than in elementary schools which have fewer resources and are accustomed to be completely dependent on the central and regional educational authorities.

Second, school board practices present several obstacles. Local governments sometimes have difficulties in selecting their representatives for the school board, because most parents do not have time to participate in the school meetings and are not able to carry out their duties as school board members. In some school sites the political divisions have bad effects on the school board practices, poisoning their integrity and unity; in other schools, school board policies clash with the principal's orientation and practices. Furthermore, in some communities, there is strong opposition to the Department of Education policies. The principal faces a strong dilemma: if he or she does what the school board wants, he or she has to go against the Department of education policies, and if he or she does what the Department of Education wants, he or she goes against the school board policies. While hired by the school board, the principal can be fired by the Department of Education if he or she is not implementing the Department of Education policies and regulations. Local business associations and the local cultural agencies have not as yet shown much interest in school reform, and it has been difficult to get their representatives working with the school board.

Third, a formal evaluation of the impact of the new model is not available because the research group -- mandated by the Ministry of Education to evaluate the new model implementation -- has not yet published the evaluation conclusions. However, the author, who is also a member of the National Educational Board and has been working with the Ministry of Education (Department of Education), has had discussions with the research group who confirmed our own conclusions based on observations in some school sites and interviews with principals and teachers. Afonso's research and evaluation done on the new model (Afonso, 1993) emphasized some positive characteristics: schools have more pedagogic autonomy, and connections with local governments and community agencies can solve the lack of resources in some cases. However, his research also concludes that teachers are still the most important decision-making body in the school and parents have no power in the decision-making structure.

Finally, dissent persists. The top officials of the Department of Education are divided with respect to the national generalization of the new model and are afraid that the model is ineffective with elementary schools. Most teacher unions do not agree with the new model. They say that teachers are losing control over the curricula, pedagogy and school practices in favor of non-professionals like parents and community agencies. Of course, Portuguese teachers never had control over the curricula because of the centralized model imposed on every school for many years.

Most Portuguese political parties agree with the new model but have doubts about its effectiveness. The Portuguese confederation of parents strongly agrees with the new model but demands that parent representatives be paid whenever they attend school board meetings. The parents' confederation claims that the school budget should include money to pay for the school board meetings, and it also asks for training and educational seminars for parents. Some educators and researchers say that the next step should be decentralization of the process of selecting and hiring teachers, so that principals and school boards participate in that process. They also say that local governments should take more responsibility over schools, specifically on school budget issues. School finances and budgets are very controversial in Portugal, because for centuries the school budget has been a matter of the central educational authorities (Ministry of Education), and local governments never had input on these matters. Teacher unions want to keep the centralization of the system, but parents support more power and financial responsibilities for local governments. This particular controversial issue will be one of the most important items on the policy agenda for the next few years.

Models of Parent Involvement

Most teachers still emphasize a compensatory model of parent involvement and do not trust parents. With projects like those reported in this report, we are trying to move away from the compensatory model and embrace the participatory model. However, most of the activities we implemented in the three schools were limited to improving communication: report cards, parents' evenings, teacher-parent conferences, and written notes. In some cases, we implemented alternative strategies of communication: home visiting, parents' newsletters, and telephone calls.

By law, parents are ascribed with new responsibilities that enhance their administrative roles, but they do not exercise educational roles. Research says that educational roles have a bigger impact on student achievement than administrative practices do (Macbeth and Ravn, 1994). We tried, in the projects reported in this section, to emphasize educational roles. In Portugal, most middle-class parents exercise some educational roles: they read to children, they buy books, they take them to the library, they reinforce student motivation, and they help children with homework (Morases et al, 1994). When middle-class parents do not have the time to exercise educational roles, they hire private teachers. In the "Rumo ao Futuro" school, children attend extra-curricular activities and benefit from tutorial activities whenever they have learning difficulties.

One of the most frequent regrets expressed about school-to-home communication is parents' frequent lack of responsibility. Some parents never contact teachers, even when teachers have asked them to do so. This especially applies to parents who belong to the lower social classes (Marques, 1989). On the other hand, some parents believe that they should not meddle too much in school matters. It seems that some parents have delegated to the school a great part of their educational responsibility as a result of the division of functions they perceive between the school and the family. In order to alter these attitudes, it would be preferable if schools lead the process of contacting parents, not just to talk about children's academic progress but also to help them develop the knowledge and skills they need to monitor and assist their own children at home.

We tried these kinds of practices in the Portuguese projects in the multi-national study. We have examples of parents exercising educational roles, assisting children with homework and reinforcing student motivation. The parents understood that education is more than schooling, and that children also learn outside school. Most of the participating teachers also understood this difference and started to incorporate into class activities the information children gathered by watching television at home, going to museums, and visiting historic buildings. In these projects we tried to transmit the message that the school is an extension of the family and that parent involvement in education requires more than parent involvement in school activities. We tried to move beyond parent participation in decision-making by emphasizing parent involvement in learning activities at home and implementing an informal communication system between teachers and parents with the use of the telephone, diary exchanges and newsletters.

A Portrait of the Portuguese Project

The group of Portuguese researchers (with one exception) has worked together since 1985, when they completed a Master of Education program at Boston University, where they knew Professor Don Davies and the work done by the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE). Since then, they have published many articles and two books, with Don Davies, about Portuguese schools and parent involvement. More recently, in 1992, they created a private non-profit research center called Instituto Para a Educacao Participada. Accepting a formal invitation from IRE and the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning (Center on Families), they implemented an action research project on school-family partnership with four elementary schools and three higher schools of education and the educational sciences faculty of the University of Lisbon, with the support of IRE's League of Schools Reaching Out and the Center on Families.

The three schools for which case studies are reported here are: the elementary school Rumo ao Futuro in Entroncamento; elementary school #1001 in Lisbon; and the elementary school of Pinhal do Rei in Leiria. All schools except the Rumo ao Futuro elementary school are public and serve a majority of low-income children. All are serving students in grades one through four.

These schools were admitted to the Institute for Responsive Education's League of Schools Reaching Out in 1992. At least ten people were directly involved as researchers. Each school principal submitted for approval by the pedagogical council his or her interest in joining the League. After pedagogical council approval, each principal submitted a proposal to the League. Each school was connected with a school of education or a university and received small grants from the Institute for Responsive Education to carry out the project interventions, which included parent centers, parents' newsletters, and home visiting. The financial arrangements and coordination were handled by the Instituto Para a Educacao Participada (IPEP), a national organization that studies and promotes school-family partnerships through research, conferences and publications.

Framework, Goals, and Methodology

Davies' work and Joyce Epstein's typology of family and community involvement provided a theoretical framework. The methodology was primarily an action research approach, grouping teachers and in some cases parents as research partners and using multiple data gathering techniques including questionnaires, interviews, and observation.

The multi-national study of schools and families stems from a basic idea: success for all children depends on the cooperation of all. If the concept of partnership is associated with this idea, the project rationale can be grasped easily. The concept of partnership requires both school reform and changes to be made by means of community structures where professional and non-professional educators work together. These schools share the concept of partnership and believe that an educational reform which is concerned with equity and excellence requires deep links with the community. These schools believe that the key for educational success lies in becoming closer to families, to local government, to companies and to community services.

We implemented an action research methodology to achieve the primary goal: to change schools so that they can establish partnerships with families and community agencies. The three schools used varying forms of action research methodology involving a team of classroom teachers, the principal (in most cases), and one or more external facilitators from a nearby school of education or university, who trained and gave scientific support to all participants.

The project had two levels of data gathering: in each school there was a research team which collected information through questionnaires, direct observations, and national seminars in which researchers exchanged information and ideas about the schools and the project. The questionnaires were developed by the Center on Families. A team of Portuguese researchers translated and adapted them for Portuguese language and culture. The questionnaires were delivered in the beginning and in the end of the year.

In each school there was a monthly meeting between researchers (teachers and facilitator). The evaluation emphasized three main questions: Does the planned action improve pupils' achievement? Does the action help to strengthen family involvement? What conditions are required in order to guarantee and extend good programs for school-family partnerships?

The national research team had three meetings to analyze and discuss data and findings: a national seminar in Santarem in 1992, a European roundtable in Faro in 1993, and a three-day international seminar in Santarem and in Lisbon in 1994. The preparation of the project's final report was the primary goal of the international seminar.

All three schools implemented interventions fitting Epstein's descriptions of involvement types 1, 2, and 3. Despite attempts to implement non-traditional communication activities, most school activities were traditional parents' nights and parent-teacher conferences. Portuguese cultural traditions tend to see schooling as a professional issue that must be carried on by professionals, and parents tend to see schools as a professional world where they only go when there are problems with their specific children. Also, in the two years of the project, we were not able in these three schools to make lasting connections with community agencies. The explanation for this lack of community connection also lies in Portuguese cultural traditions. For centuries, public schools have been seen as a central educational authority concern with no participation of local governments and local communities. Only very recently, local governments started to receive educational responsibilities related to elementary schools -- student transportation and building elementary schools.

Additional comments about the limitations and the learning from the three Portuguese schools, along with some of the author's recommendations, will be offered in a brief section following the three case studies.

RUMO AO FUTURO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

By Ramiro Marques

The Rumo au Futuro school is located in Encontramento, a small city of 18,000 inhabitants, located 90 miles north and east of Lisbon. Most residents work in schools, shops, mills, and army headquarters. The area does not have big factories or farms. All houses have electricity and water, and the unemployment rate is lower than the national average.

The school is private and belongs to the local Catholic church. It is located in a small building with six classrooms and a room that serves as a family center. A playground surrounds the building. Children are bused from all over the small city. The state pays for the tuition of children whose families live below the poverty line. The school has six teachers; the state pays the salaries of three of the teachers, and two teachers are aides who coordinate extracurricular activities and tutorial programs.

This school has 120 students from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds. Half are from middle class families with an average annual income of 20,000 USD, and one third of these are from families with college education; the other half belong to working class families with an average annual income of 12,000 USD, and most of these parents have only nine years of schooling. Ninety-seven percent of the students are European, and three percent are African.

The children come to the school at 9 a.m. and wear uniforms. They leave the school at 5 p.m., or in some cases at 7 p.m. In the morning, they attend academic activities, and in the afternoon, they attend tutorial programs and extracurricular activities. In some ways, this school is like an American "magnet school" or "school of choice." It has some characteristics that differentiate its curriculum, philosophy and pedagogical practices from those of other schools: i) the school offers after school programs (tutorial teaching and cultural activities); ii) the curriculum emphasizes traditional academic areas; iii) the school climate emphasizes discipline and traditional values. Families know that this school is different from the public schools in the small city. The school owns a bus that meets children near their houses. However, families have to pay a small fee so that their children can use the school bus. The state pays for the low-income students' tuition, but the school must admit a prescribed percentage of children from families below the poverty line. The connections with the local government are regular and intense: students use the municipal swimming pool, where they have swimming lessons, and they receive the support of the local government for field trips.

Not many schools in Portugal are like the Rumo ao Futuro school. Less than five percent of elementary school students attend private schools, and most of the private schools are run by the Catholic Church. The Association of Private School Owners is pushing for governmental vouchers, so that all parents -- either middle-income or low-income -- can have an opportunity to choose schools. The private school advocates say that these schools are schools of choice and offer educational programs that serve families' needs. Teacher unions, however, do not agree; many private school owners do not pay teachers as much as the State does.

Research Questions

The study emphasized three main questions:

1. Does the planned action improve pupil achievement?
2. Does the action help to strengthen family involvement?
3. What conditions are required in order to make it possible to guarantee and extend good programs for school-family partnerships?

Methodology

The "Rumo ao Futuro" project, like the others in the multi-national study, used a team of teachers, the school head, and the external facilitator, who was the author of this study and a professor at the Escola Superior de Educação de Santarém.

In this school the questionnaires prepared by the Center on Families were not deemed very useful, because the school's context and culture are different from the American context. The data provided by the interviews and notes and reports by the principal and teachers were more useful for analyzing and evaluating the impact of interventions.

The research team did not include parents. Two of the six teachers -- the principal and the assistant principal -- had regular, monthly meetings with the facilitator to present and analyze data and to discuss the impact of the interventions. The agenda was set up by the facilitator and included two-hour seminars on "difficult" and "progress" and Center on Families' reports discussions. They wrote two reports about the project and presented them in two seminars: in Santarém, during the National Seminar on Schools and Families Partnerships, and in Faro, at the European Roundtable on Family and School Partnerships. The other four teachers did not want to join the research team, because they felt that they did not have enough time for the project. However, the principal's educational leadership required all teachers to implement parent involvement strategies. The principal also attended a graduate program on school administration and is now preparing a dissertation about this project. In some of the monthly meetings, the facilitator helped him with materials and ideas useful to his dissertation.

The assistant principal conducted interviews with teachers and parents, and the data provided by the interviews were discussed by the research team. In those meetings, the research team discussed the following topics: the ideology and philosophy of the League of Schools Reaching Out; Joyce Epstein's typology of family and community involvement; the Accelerated Schools model; and alternative ways of communicating with parents. In some cases, the team discussed articles and reports published by the Center on Families, IRE, and the Portuguese center Instituto Para A Educação Participada.

Teachers' Comments from the Interviews

The teachers who participated in the action research team were teachers and administrators (principal and the assistant principal). There are three reasons that explain their commitment to the project: the principal was enrolled in a graduate program in educational administration; both wanted to attract more students to the school; and their relationship with the project was also a pre-condition to having their salaries paid by the state. The latter reason needs additional explanation: Both teachers teach in a private school, but their salaries are paid with government money. In order to have their salaries paid by the government, teachers need to prove that their private school is engaged in an innovative educational project.

The principal is 32 years old and the assistant principal is 29 years old. They have taught since 1988 and are very enthusiastic about parent involvement, schools of choice, and charter schools. They said to the external facilitator that "we created this school two years after our graduation, and we want to prove that teachers have a sense of entrepreneurship and a capacity to design and implement projects." They also said that, "we are critics of the uniformity of public schools and we think that they are not responsive to families' needs." In another interview they said, "public schools are in need of educational leadership; what we try to do with this school is to create a school culture that differentiates its from the other schools."

Brief Description of Their In-service Activities

The external facilitator and these two teachers participated in monthly meetings with three goals: review the project implementation; discuss reports and newsletters sent by the Institute for Responsive Education, Center on Families, and League of Schools Reaching Out; prepare presentations for national conferences and symposia. The first goal was reached through discussion of questionnaire data, analysis of difficulties, and brainstorming about ideas to improve the project implementation. The second goal was reached through group study. The third goal was reached through the preparation of speeches, reports and communications. The action team presented communications in three national conferences -- the European Roundtable (in Faro) in 1993 and several symposia in Schools of Education.

The principal said, "this project taught me how to do action research and helped me to write a report and to present a communication." The assistant principal said, "receiving all this material from the Center on Families and from the League of Schools Reaching Out was a good way of being connected with international research on this topic." They said, "participating in this project improved the school educational program." At another time, he said, "this was a good opportunity for professional growth, because, in Portugal, it is unusual to have a team of researchers with teacher participation and the help of an external facilitator." The principal also said, "being a researcher of the League of Schools Reaching Out provided us with informative materials and gave us international and national support and visibility." The participation in this project and the reports and conferences helped the principal and assistant principal to be promoted in their teaching careers and gave them public visibility and recognition. Their enthusiasm still remains and they are trying to be included in other international projects about school restructuring and family involvement.

The lack of teacher participation may be due to a lack of pressure for professional development. In Portugal, teachers with more than twenty years of teaching have to take an open examination in order to be promoted and get a substantial increase in salary. The open examination includes a discussion of an educational report about a project developed at the school level. However, only teachers working at state schools benefit from this kind of promotion. The teachers working in private schools work more hours per week and receive less. The principal and the assistant principal have their salaries paid by the state and are obliged to apply for the open examination in order to get a promotion. Even though they are young, they need to enrich their curricula vitae, and their participation in the project has been a good method of personal development.

We can conclude that state mandates on teacher development and promotion are stimuli for school improvement and educational innovation.

The Interventions

During the two years, we implemented three main interventions: we created a family center, established an open telephone line for families, and initiated an after-school program.

The family center is a small room with a table, chairs, a coffee machine, and a telephone. The parents hold informal meetings there. It is also a space to keep informative materials and to talk. The teachers give parents their home telephone numbers so that parents can reach them even in the evenings and on weekends. We decided to create a family center because we wanted parents to feel welcome in the school. In order to feel welcome, parents needed a place of their own, where they could have meetings and keep informative materials. Unfortunately, the family center was not run by parents but by the principal. The author asked the principal to keep a record of parents' meetings held at the family center, but the principal was not able to provide one because parents have rarely used the family center for meetings. The monthly meetings with parents were held in a bigger room, because they required a room seating more than fifty persons. The principal reported that parents were not familiar with having a room of their own and did not have time to use it. According to the principal, parents preferred to meet with teachers to address school problems and discuss ways of improving curriculum and students' learning.

The open telephone line was the most successful intervention. All of the school's families have telephones and are familiar with calling the principal and the teachers. In fact, the principal asked parents to call teachers' homes, even in the evenings and on weekends, and they called often. The telephone calls were, in most cases, about problems related to particular children who were experiencing learning difficulties or health problems. Also, calls addressed arrangements, schedules and procedures related to school trips. Three in four parents called the principal or a teacher at least once per trimester and one in four called more than one time per trimester. Both teachers and parents stated that the open telephone line was very useful. Some parents reported, "When my child attended a public school I never had the chance to have the teacher's telephone number." Others said, "It is very easy and convenient to make a call to my child's teacher after dinner." One parent added, "Since we do not have time to go to the school and see the teacher, it is much easier to communicate by telephoning the teacher at home."

There were three types of after-school programs: arts, physical education, and tutorial activities. The parents were welcomed to the school, often to assist the teachers in the classrooms, telling stories and singing, or preparing field trips. In each class, only two or three parents participated in classroom activities, as aides or doing voluntary work in preparing field trips and school parties. According to the principal, there were approximately twelve parents who worked regularly in classrooms. Who were those parents? The author could not identify any low-income parents in that group. All of them were college educated, and eight of them were teachers in local public schools.

The school held a monthly parents' meeting. More than fifty percent of the parents attended the meetings, usually on Friday evenings. The agenda was always decided by the principal. Neither teachers nor parents had a role in determining the agenda. However, the meetings were very participatory, and the parents not only asked questions but also disagreed with the principal. The author assisted in five meetings and observed that there was a group of parents who were not satisfied with the principal's leadership. Sometimes, the principal was accused of hiding problems and "painting the school with rosy colors." Some of the parents were upset with transportation problems (the schedule of the school buses and safety problems with the bus). In at least two meetings the principal was accused by three parents of severely punishing students. However, the author observed that most parents were satisfied with punishment procedures in the school.

More than two thirds of the parents were very satisfied with the school curriculum, pedagogy and disciplinary procedures. Several parents noted that "this school not only teaches math and the sciences but also civic education and religion," while others reported that "this is a school free of drugs and violence." Less than ten percent of parents said they were not satisfied with the school and the teachers. Those parents complained, "We do not agree with punishment in school." One parent added, "Children need to play more in a non-directive way."

Most activities developed at this school were Epstein's type 2 and 3 practices (school-to-home communication and parents helping at the school). The practices, typically, were meetings with parents, family newsletters, and telephone calls to parents. The facilitator had meetings with two of the six teachers once each month. The teachers received informative materials and books about parent involvement. At the end of the year, a parent committee coordinated a school party with a lunch, a festival and a conference. In the first year, the author of this section made a speech about the Multi-national Study. In the second year, the principal invited the superintendent of the schools for that region, and he delivered a speech about private schools and schools of choice.

Outcomes, Analysis, and Discussion

The principal wrote two reports about the project. Those reports presented the data collection and discussed the results. The main conclusions were:

- The parents are satisfied with the communicative processes between teachers and families *("We can reach teachers even on weekends")*;
- Many parents reported that they have a voice on school policies and practices *("In this school I can say to the principal what is wrong with the school and he is responsive to my claims")*;
- Parents said the school satisfied families' needs and expectations;
- Parents said they had opportunities to talk with teachers about objectives, to make decisions together, and to make plans together to solve problems;
- Parents had frequent opportunities to communicate in school and to make contacts when problems arise;
- Both parents and teachers said they reinforced student motivation, positive behaviors and homework routines *("This is a school where disciplinary problems are faced and solved;" "This school has a positive atmosphere and everybody shares positive values;" "This is a school where everybody reinforces Christian values and attitudes")*.

The analysis of the data from interviews, observations and meetings, and from the principal's reports, allowed our team in the school to conclude that parents and teachers developed positive attitudes toward cooperation and actually began to coordinate their activities. Furthermore, some parents reported that an atmosphere developed in their families which allowed children to perceive continuity between the home and the school, helping children to develop more positive attitudes toward school and learning.

Other important achievements included an increase in communication between school personnel and families. Parents, teachers and the college facilitator met periodically to exchange ideas and solve problems. Also, the facilitator met once a month with the principal and teachers in order to exchange ideas and review the project in a process of in-service teacher training. The principal reported that "being involved with this project taught him how to work better with other people, how to run meetings in a more positive way, and how to write a research report." He also reported that "the school image is now stronger, and community residents know this school is different from the others in the community and that the school is concerned with educational reform and program adequacy."

A few project limitations must be noted: parents did not participate on the research team; parents did not participate on the school board or on other decision-making councils; and the parents' center was seen only as a room for periodic meetings and was run by the principal, not by parents.

Obstacles and Assistance

We now recognize some difficulties that can jeopardize projects like this one:

a) when the principal does not trust parents, the project cannot keep going for long;

b) when the teachers do not have information about parent involvement and school-family partnerships, they are not able to implement such practices;

c) when state and local educational authorities do not mandate parent involvement, teachers tend to see it as a non-professional interruption in schools;

d) when school finance is entirely dependent on state funds and when there are no state mandates on parent involvement, it is very difficult to raise money to finance parent involvement projects.

In the view of the team and the facilitator, the project goals were reached due to strong leadership, participation, and resources. First, the principal's leadership was essential. The principal trusted parents, got information about how to implement the project, remained committed to the project, and provided strong educational leadership. Second, teachers were prepared to implement the program. Finally, there was a small amount of money to start the project, and that money was enough to create a family center and to fund the family newsletter (published four times per year).

This project demonstrated that family and school partnerships can contribute directly to helping both teachers and parents and to building a spirit of cooperation in school.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The most important conclusion of this project is that the school's outreach activities had positive effects on the children and served the needs of families. The parents viewed the school as a territory of their own and a place where they have a voice. "Having a voice" did not mean that parents had representatives on the management team of the school, but rather that the principal was concerned with parents' needs and tried to address them.

This feeling of ownership may be related to the fact that this is a school of choice. Those in charge of the school understand how important it is to respond to the needs of children and families who are seen as consumers with rights and responsibilities and with other options. In the 1994-95 school year there was a long waiting list, and the management board of the school plans to build a basic school where they will enroll students between five and fifteen years old. The new school will be built with EU money and the financial support of the local government, which offers the land. According to the principal, the new school will be in operation in 1998.

This project demonstrated that family and school partnerships can contribute to strengthening families so that they are more able to be involved in their children's schools and learning; making schools more responsive to family needs and expectations; making schools more effective and efficient by restructuring their organization and their decision-making processes; and changing teachers' attitudes about families through an action research process that is meaningful to everybody. The involvement of an external facilitator, with whom teachers worked in all phases of the project, is an important tool for educational change and helps an action research team to work well.

The author believes that the work in this school illuminates some important ideas that may be related to supporting children's learning. One is the importance of the "whole child" concept, which means that schools, along with other agencies, must be concerned about health and social services. A school's connections with local government and community agencies can help to promote more comprehensive services for children and families.

A second important idea, confirmed by other case studies, is the evident need for increased professional development among teachers. The efficiency of these projects will be higher when teachers have the knowledge and the experience to put them into practice and when they believe in their positive effects. Also, these kinds of projects will be more efficient when school budgets designate some money to finance parent involvement activities.

Participants remained concerned about the low representation of low-income families in school activities. The author concluded, unhappily, that only a few middle-class parents participated in the coordination of the family center, and these parents prepared the field trips. I must conclude that this project failed to implement interventions that adequately motivated low-income parents to participate. Despite this limitation, however, we can say that low-income parents assisted regularly in school meetings.

Will the project be sustained? The author posed this question to the principal and teachers. They reported that these school-family interventions are very well assimilated into the school culture, and that they will continue to implement them in the future, since they have the support of the local church and the local government. The family center might be abandoned, because only a few middle-class parents used it, but the telephone line, parents' newsletters and parents' nights will continue.

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A DIALOGUE BETWEEN CULTURES: A REPORT OF THE SCHOOL-FAMILY RELATIONSHIP IN PINHAL DO REI ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

By Pedro Silva and Ricardo Vieira
Translation from Portuguese by Carlos Vieira

"Parents and teachers have different interests"[1]

Introduction

This project is part of an international study being conducted by the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning and the Institute for Responsive Education's League of Schools Reaching Out (LSRO), and is coordinated in Portugal by the Instituto Para a Educação Participada (IPEP).

One of the common threads among the different studies is the collaboration between teachers and parents (or members of the Parents' Association -- PA) at each of the participating schools, and one or more outside researchers, usually from an institution of higher education. In this case, the group consists of teachers, members of the school PA, and two researchers, both teachers at a public teachers' college -- Escola Superior de Educação do Instituto Politecnico, of Leiria.

The school under study is the Pinhal do Rei Elementary School (grades 1 through 4), a public school of 74 students and 4 female teachers. The school's architecture is typical of Portuguese schools built under the "Centenarios" plan, and has two floors and three classrooms. The school is located in the suburbs of the coastal city of Leiria, in the center of Portugal, an area in which old agricultural fields, small commerce, considerable industry, and the service sector mingle.

The researchers have divided the report according to the three major social groups which make up the study: the parents, the members of the PA, and the teachers. We attempt to identify the culture of each one of these groups and their perspectives and representations of some of the events and activities. We also include a chapter about the dynamic generated by the interaction between the three groups, and conclude with a personal reflection over the whole process and the limitations and factors -- particularly institutional -- which shaped the results.

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[1] Mother, President of the Parents' Association, and high school teacher

Theoretical and Methodological Issues

Researchers have found a high, positive correlation between family participation in their children's education and children's academic success (Henderson and Berla, 1994).[2]

We also know that family participation takes place mostly along two slopes: school and home. Knowledge of what takes place in the home requires a study of family educational strategies, identification of educational styles and, in the last analysis, the comparison between these styles and those favored by the school. Such was not the goal of this study.

This research has focused on the school slope. As such, we aimed to:

- create a brief socio-cultural portrait of the families through direct contacts, information collected from the teachers, and career and educational data;
- identify the families most reluctant to visit the school, even during social events;
- assess the strategies already being used;
- identify, together with the teachers and members of the Parents' Association, alternative strategies which would stimulate these families to visit the school.

We intended this project to be as close to an action research methodology as possible. Therefore, we met regularly with a group of teachers and members of the PA.

The study went on for two years -- 1992-93 and 1993-94 -- and we used a participant-observer approach. As such, the research took on a clear ethnographic character through the participation by the two researchers in dozens of meetings (with teachers and members of the

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[2] Translation from the Portuguese

PA), in multiple school activities involving parent participation (such as formal meetings and social events), and in countless informal conversations with all the actors involved in the project. Although, as we shall see in another chapter, the two researchers "caught a train already in motion" (in regard to the existence of activities tuned to the family), their presence possibly helped maintain and expand the dynamic already present. At least in two aspects their action was decisive: in helping legalize the PA, and in the creation of a school newspaper -- "O Letrinhas" ("ABC's") -- which was meant to provide the various participants with a medium of their own (as such, the newspaper was divided into several 'corners').

At the beginning and at the end of the '92-'93 school year, we also distributed the questionnaires developed by the LSRO and the IPEP, which we decided not to take into account due to our realization of the gap between their sophistication and the essentially oral culture of the parents. This gap created clear difficulties for the parents in filling out the questionnaires, raising doubts about the validity of their results.

Although the two researchers are affiliated with a teachers' college, the college did not intervene in the study. The researchers always acted independently and were not affiliated institutionally beyond the IPEP.

All the names in this report, including the school name, are fictitious.

The Concept of Culture

When we decided to use the concept of culture, as applied to the three groups present in our analysis, we chose not to follow the classical anthropological definitions which refer to the "learned behaviors...," "art, knowledge and technical skills of a particular group," or even exclusively to "the beliefs associated with religious phenomena and the mythology of a group" (Kroeber, 1952).[3] "Culture is a word to which have already been given so many meanings that one more should not make a difference" (Hall, 1959).[4]

The concept of *culture* is used here to suggest the pattern of meaningful organization in terms of representations and symbols, resulting from varied social circumstances and constructions among which are social origin and the different interactions to which each individual from each group is exposed. The focus of such an approach is to gain knowledge of the cultural and professional identity of each actor: Who are the parents? Who are the teachers? What is the Parents' Association? What is the dynamic resulting from the *interaction between these cultures* which meet sometimes in solidarity, other times juxtaposed, and, in other instances, with friction?

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[3] Translation from the Portuguese

[4] Idem.

The Parents' Culture

As a social group, the parents involved in the educational process of this school are very diverse. They are engaged in a large variety of jobs which fall primarily into the secondary and tertiary employment sectors.

Factory work is the most common profession among both mothers and fathers -- 23 and 20, respectively, followed by a smaller group of merchants -- 15 fathers and 7 mothers. Also worth mentioning is the number of homemakers among the women: 17.

In regard to the level of academic achievement, the majority of fathers and mothers have completed fourth grade education -- 26 and 22, respectively. Only two fathers and three mothers earned a bachelor's degree from among a group of about 150 parents.

It is clear that this heterogeneity is reflected in the parents' attitudes towards life and school. It is natural that the majority of them regard with skepticism the invitation for their involvement in school affairs since, in their recollection, parents went to the school only when they were summoned, if there were discipline problems with their children. Suddenly, it was necessary for them to look at the school's mission of teaching, and the family's role in education, beyond the previous experiences.

However, from this socially and culturally diverse whole, a smaller group of parents came forward, by virtue of being closer to the school's thought and practice, to form the Parents' Association. The majority of parents, those closer to the median culture of the total parent body, usually stayed home in the evening watching television while meetings took place at school to plan the direction of their children's education.

The founders and continuing members of the Parents' Association were the closest to the philosophy of the action-research project in which we participated, and also to the

Portuguese law that today promulgates their involvement: Bill ("Despacho") 239/ME/93. It is about this group that we will make the following observations.

To start, it is important to point out the roles that some of the mothers, in particular Mariana, also a member of the Parents' Association board, played during the two years of the project animating "tempos livres" -- non-curricular or "leisure time" (LT) activities. Paradoxically, this mother didn't seem to be particularly qualified according to her educational background. She is a housewife and the wife of a bank clerk. However, among her friends were teachers and other people with bachelor's degrees. She became involved in the Parents' Association from the very start. Although she could have been concerned exclusively with her son's education she instead became involved in the "leisure time" activities, helping and motivating all children.

Different from the majority of the teachers, this mother knows the community well: she knows most of the families, she has played a rich mediating role between parents and school, and the communication and instruction of the children has benefited from her capacity for motivation, empathy, and interpretation. In fact, she is like a tribe elder who knows the local processes of enculturation and socialization, and knows how to filter the school culture, sometimes abstract and anomalous, to the children. She helps others avoid the conflict that exists between the different knowledge, culture and language that school and local community have.

This mother, therefore, is positioned as a mediator between the parent culture and the teacher culture, even though she identifies herself more with one group than with the other. She is an exception among the parents since she is able to take advantage of her practical wisdom to "cultivate" the literacy of the "popular culture."

This role, which had not been anticipated by the researchers but had emerged spontaneously, is certainly useful as inspiration to other pedagogies and methodologies that facilitate the instruction of groups of children from different cultural backgrounds. Beyond the uniform knowledge the school tries to impart, these children are confronted in school with a variety of people and social experiences such as, for instance, the different profiles of teachers they encounter.

The Parents' Association Culture

Pre-History

In 1991-92, the Parents' Association was formed at this school due to the initiative of Ana Luisa, a recently-arrived teacher who was elected school director. Informal contacts with the parents led to the formation of a PA with about 12 members, two of whom were men. Five of the mothers were teachers or former teachers, four at the secondary and one at the elementary level. Together with one or two more mothers, they quickly coalesced to become the strong core of the group. One of them, a social worker in the local high school who had also been a teacher for ten years, became the president of the PA.

This group became dynamic and developed several activities. Close to the end of the school year, at the time of the first contacts with the researchers, the PA decided that they wanted to obtain legal status as an organization.

First Year of the Study

When the 1992-93 school year started, we were formally involved in the project. The PA had consolidated in part due to the success of the "leisure time" summer program, for which it was responsible. With support of the two researchers, to the best of our knowledge, this PA was the first to ever become institutionalized in an elementary school in the area of Leiria. With legalization, the group assumes the status of "Installing Commission," presided over by the initial leader.

This group met regularly and organized a number of activities - most of them in partnership with the teachers -- and progressively demonstrated initiative and a sense of cohesion. It developed a sense of group identity, particularly in its core. Soon after, it began sharing with the teaching staff the power to call meetings and choose the issues to be discussed.

Second Year of the Study

With the new school year, the PA retained all of its previous members and added two more - one more high school teacher and a clerk from the local City Hall, who is also the wife of a high school teacher. In December, the Installing Commission ceased its functions and held the first elections. Because of the legal requirements, the group was now forced to establish several formal units: board of directors, general assembly, and fiscal committee. Citing personal and family reasons, the former president of the PA resigned. The directorship, the principal executive organ, and the general assembly, which organizes and coordinates the meetings with parents, were now led by parents who are high school teachers.

The PA still had the momentum built during the two previous years. But, for the first time, it had to deal with a new director and a new teaching staff, with the exception of Ana Luisa, the teacher who had initiated the process when she was elected director. The PA maintained almost all of its initial members and a teaching staff almost entirely new to the school.

By the end of the year, it became obvious that the PA had become an autonomous player in the school. This autonomy was based on two factors, only apparently contradictory:

- non-interference in issues considered within the pedagogical scope and accepted to be the teaching staff's exclusive responsibility;
- the attempt to create their own territory independent from the teachers.

This last factor couldn't help but create some tension among some of the teaching staff. For instance, the LT activities, which had become the flagship of the PA, was the target of an unsuccessful attempt for control by the teaching staff. In another instance, when calling for a meeting between the PA and the parents, the PA requested that the teachers not be present, supposedly so that the parents could be more at ease. Moreover, there was an instance in which the PA contested the punishment imposed by the school on a student. The teachers considered this protest as interfering with their pedagogical prerogatives.

The PA evolved, therefore, from a group formed and animated by a teacher with the goal of developing informal activities together to a group which searched avidly to build its own identity and to gain legitimate social status -- vis-a-vis the teachers, parents, and even before the local educational and civil authorities.

Finally, the tension between the PA and the teaching staff may also have stemmed from the PA's growing autonomy and from the willingness of the PA to disregard the professional opinions of others in the school community.

The Teacher Culture

When we speak of the teacher culture, our objective is not to search for a common and harmonious identity of an observed group of teachers who share a particular knowledge derived from their academic background, certain daily rituals, similar hobbies, ways of dressing, and communicating in order to explain a certain type.

On the contrary, the relevance of the title is due to the fact that our field work during the '92-'93 and '93-'94 school years has given us data which point to a strong cultural heterogeneity among this group of actors in the instruction-learning process at the School Pinhal do Rei.

In the two years of the study all of the teachers were female and all had years of experience teaching in elementary schools. But they did not hold uniform views in regard to school-family involvement, its usefulness and functionality, the guiding principles of the "leisure time" activities, and the priorities in the school curricula.

During the two years in which the action-research took place, we witnessed the clash between these social representations, underlying the discourse produced for the parents and many of the ideas expressed in teacher meetings or in meetings between teachers and the PA.

The school's educational project, basically a plan drawn with certain goals of action surrounding a question, changed radically. In the first year, the school used the theme "Full Time Learning School" (Escola a Tempo Inteiro), based on a "leisure time" philosophy and the children's involvement in games and recreational activities, which many of them would have never had access to outside of the school because of lack of economic means. Now, in the second year, the teachers chose the project theme, "In Pinhal do Rei's Country: from Past to Present (Por Terras de Pinhal do Rei: do Passado ao Presente).

We do not want to suggest that this change is necessarily negative. On the contrary, we know that change is often a useful way to escape routine. We cannot say that the school project got worse; it became more folksy, less original, and similar to many others centered on a theme which is becoming common in all of the country's schools at the present moment in the reform of the Portuguese educational system. Not only did the theme or title change, but the focus also changed. The school, paradoxically, seemed to move away from the goals of family involvement that we, as IPEP researchers, had sponsored. The teachers seemed to abandon the objective of building a more democratic school, with everyone's involvement and with success for all, and the democratic ideals of the law which currently governs the Portuguese educational system (Lei de Bases do Sistema Educativo).

The parents, through the PA, fought a "war" with the teachers in reference to the laws, and insisted on redesigning their participation. The teachers who had recently arrived at the school were more persuasive and charismatic as a group and envisioned the Parents' Association participation in a different form.

At this moment, the question is not necessarily whether the change was intentional. It was a fact. The new process of involvement, although it is still being structured/restructured as this report is written, was the result of the interaction of two profiles of teachers, together with the culture of the Parents' Association.

The scientific interest is precisely in the realization that just as children are different, not only because of their socioeconomic background but also because of their different cognitive styles influenced by cultural habits outside of the school, so the teachers are diverse. They are different not so much, in this case, because of the varied political-pedagogical experiences to which they were exposed while students (they are very close in age and the schools they attended certainly drank from the same ideologies), but because they have adopted different views, as in their different attitudes towards what a school is and what should remain the same or change.

The teachers' different attitudes come, in part, from different personal, academic and extra-curricular experiences. These experiences draw some teachers toward a traditional model of instruction and authoritative attitudes and others to a model open to pedagogical renewal, which recognizes different ways of knowing and welcomes the involvement of parents and others in the community.

These differences in attitude are reflected in the school's day-to-day life and decisions, in the interpersonal relations among the teachers, parents, and students, and, of course, in the educational project that, as we know, springs from the desire to satisfy a certain need or resolve some dilemma or problem arising from the environment.

To analyze the biographical paths of the seven teachers involved requires a methodology of life analysis beyond the present study. However, we may say that among the teachers who intervened more frequently in the verbal clarification and restructuring of the school identity -- Ana Luisa, teacher since the beginning of the study, Etelvina who arrived in 1992, and Isabel, who began in 1993 -- there is a common biographical characteristic: all of them grew up in small rural villages. *A priori*, such experience could be pedagogically useful when dealing with children from similar backgrounds. They could take advantage of that experience to build an intercultural and comparative pedagogy to bridge the local culture and the rationalist culture of the school, without erasing the local traditions.

There are certainly other factors which might activate or deactivate a teacher's earlier experiences and cause her to reflect experiences in everyday pedagogical practice. Perhaps the best example in this study of a teacher drawing on her own childhood experience and memories was Ana Luisa, the teacher who was the initiator of the project and was the most interested in a pedagogy of family participation even before our arrival at the school.

We believe that our action-intervention was positive and contributed to the strengthening of the family-teacher relations, in particular by helping some parents believe in the scientific virtues of their involvement, and in the formalization of the parents' participation in an association, the first of its kind in the elementary school of the Leiria region.

The school project changed in the second year, moving toward less integration and cooperation between parents and teachers. The initiating teacher was not reelected director by the rest of the teachers, who were mostly new to the school. Despite her seniority, she lost some credibility among her colleagues, who resisted her initiatives and were now a majority of the teaching staff and able to dilute the charisma she had been able to use to persuade.

The following comments illustrate the discourse resulting from the cultural and attitudinal differences among the teachers:

> In 1992, during a parent meeting, teacher Etelvina told the parents, *"Class interruptions should be avoided; parents should arrive at the beginning or at the end of the activities. I'll mind your children here and you at home. The 'leisure time' activities will be used for children to do their homework [she was referring to the change she'd like to make in regard to the philosophy of the LT during the summer vacations of 1992, when these had been initiated]."*
>
> Ana Luisa, the school director at the time, replied, *"But not only! They are also for the choir, skating, etc."*
>
> Two years later, when Isabel became the school director, there was a new discourse in regard to the LT. This time it was much better structured since it came from a woman with great power for verbal communication. Isabel told the parents, *"Don't be afraid of coming to the school to talk with the teacher if there is something you disagree with. Don't do your children's homework at home. If your child doesn't know how to do it, she'll ask the teacher the next day. We are not here to evaluate the parents."*
>
> She added that, as the school director, she is available to receive parents at any time -- even after school hours. Although verbally the director manifested a strong interest in the connection between school and family, her practice is quite different.

Here we see different types of social representations about the school's role and its relationship with families and the community, as well as about the purposes of "leisure time" activities. When we speak of teacher culture, we do not wish to characterize these professionals as individuals with static structures, built in a fashion which will lead them to act rigidly or in mechanical ways.

We think of teacher culture as a process, one that is continuously being structured/unstructured/restructured. However, we believe in the strength of the influence of early experiences and interactions from childhood, the time of professional training, and the first years of teaching on teachers' ways of classifying the world and thinking about schools and schooling.

A Dialogue Between Cultures: School Interaction and Dynamic

The dynamic developed during these past two years was one in constant motion. The dynamic was seen in the *product* and in the *process*.

The Product

Two main types of activities, formal and informal, occur concurrently. Formal activities include meetings traditionally scheduled by teachers in the evenings. In the second year, the PA started to request these meetings, with an agenda negotiated between and signed jointly by the school director and the PA president. This was one way of trying to attract more parents to the school. At least this was the "official" reason; in fact, these meetings constituted one way for the PA to achieve social legitimacy and consolidation.

In informal or non-formal activities we include all those social activities which took place over time and included the traditional Christmas, Carnival, and other events such as the New Year's party, a musical performance, and other celebrations. These events were always scheduled for Saturday afternoons (with the exception of the musical event which took place in the evening, at a local club) and were generally well received by the parents and the community. At these celebrations, food and drinks were always provided by the PA, which was one way to raise funds for other activities.

Perhaps the most original activity is the one that sets this project apart -- the sponsorship of a "leisure time" program for children. This program was the flagship of the PA, which quickly made it clear that they owned the program. The program took place in the afternoon, after the conclusion of classes (only one class which had an afternoon school schedule couldn't take advantage of these activities).

The program sought to provide creative occupations for those students who didn't have non-curricular structured activities, or those students whose families couldn't attend to them because of work.

The LT that followed throughout the school year -- including intersession vacations -- began as the result of a similar program that took place at the school during the summer of '92, which was a success. The summer program included activities that are essentially expressive, but also field-trips, including one to the sea (where one child saw the ocean for the first time) and to a local swimming-pool.

The content of the LT throughout the school year was more problematic. One of the teachers advocated openly using this time to do homework, while another saw its purpose as complementing school activities. The PA convened the parents and brought this issue of the nature of the program up for discussion. The PA decided that the first hour was to be used to do homework, while the second would be for other types of activities such as painting, and model building.

The LT during the school year produced an unexpected result: a kind of informal network where the mothers would meet and talk about school issues. This network involved mainly those mothers who would rarely show up for meetings, but who otherwise felt comfortable in this non-formal environment.

We want to underscore the role Mariana played in these activities. She was the only mother in the core of the PA who was not also a teacher. She also served as PA vice-president.

Another interesting aspect of the LT was the fact that it was embraced by the economically disadvantaged students, some of whom were students with academic and disciplinary problems. According to one of the teachers, their integration in this activity and the additional attention they received in the program positively affected their academic performance and school behavior.

The students paid a token fee for their participation in the LT. However, those who could not afford to pay were accepted just the same by the PA. The PA prepared the first LT during the summer with these children in mind and always kept this policy of support.

In the middle of the second year, after the almost complete renewal of the teaching staff, the teachers tried to participate in the LT, supposedly to offer support. They informed the PA that the second hour would be used for doing homework and that they, the teachers, would be present during the first hour. The fact that they communicated this to the PA without a previous discussion created a certain discomfort between the two groups. The PA perceived this unilateral decision by the teachers as an attempt to control the LT. Other meetings followed but, in the end, everything remained the same -- everything except for the animosity which grew larger between the two groups.

The friction had actually started earlier with some unilateral decisions made by the teachers; for example, they told the parents that the Christmas party in the second year would take place on a Friday afternoon rather than on the traditional Saturday.

The second year was marked by a stronger posture on the part of the PA and a counter reaction by the teachers to this assertiveness. Cooperation gave way to argumentation. The change in teaching staff and in director was not related to this state of affairs. During the second year the heterogeneity of the teaching staff became even more obvious. That resulted in the ostracism of the teacher who had initiated the process and her loss of the leadership position she had previously held. She became almost exclusively a spectator of the relationships between the two groups.

Two other groups -- the children and the parents at large -- apparently did not have a significant influence in the relationships between the PA and the teachers.

The Process

Considering the social representations behind the school-family cooperation among the parents, the Parents' Association and the teachers, we can now try to synthesize the three types of involvement which developed and consolidated in the network of interactions between the different cultures we have described.

In the first phase, corresponding to the pre-history of the PA and immediately after, the school-family relationship took a somewhat unilateral form; parents were expected to help in the school in various ways, such as improving the facilities and cooperating in the organization of holiday celebrations. Even in this period, however, some initiatives of the PA were supported by the teachers, and vice-versa.

School → Parents

In a second phase, after the Parents' Association was legally constituted and its directorship was changed, there was a team that wished to go further. Because they were knowledgeable about the realities of their school and the legislation which governs it (the president of the board of directors and the president of the general assembly are teachers and close to the academic culture) they demanded their own space in the school -- physical space, because the law prescribes a room for parents to meet in, and a space for intervention, consultation, and decision-making. A more or less ideal model was sought in which the communication between the two players involved was affected by a bilateral relationship that was mutual and based on equality in much of the decision-making concerning the instruction-learning process and opportunities for students.

School ↔ Parents

In a third phase, still underway, we see a communication conflict between teachers and the PA, an increase in the teachers' political strength, or the PA tiring in its demands. The direction of the arrow has not changed symmetrically but metaphorically, because in the future it is possible to see the parents begging teachers for concessions rather than demanding them.

School ← Parents

We may conclude that the future of the school-family relationship -- not only in this one school but possibly more broadly in the country -- may fall into a process of extremes, both characterized by unilateral actions. Two different conditions may arise:

1. A subservient relationship: Parents visit the school, listen carefully and submissively to the eloquent discourse that comes from the teachers, asking, soliciting, suggesting and expecting help from everybody in the name of the children's well-being. In this case, we find parents with a personal culture which differs greatly from that of the teachers, who clearly perceive parent involvement as consultation and financial help. The latter role supplements or even partially replaces the role of the nation and/or the local authorities. In this situation, parents become a group of boy and girl scouts available to help the teachers.

2. Two power fronts: In parent associations that elect as directors, almost exclusively, those parents who have more formal education and are intellectuals, two fronts are created in the organization of activities and in the distribution of power and competencies, as in the interpretation of the Law which mandates parent involvement. On one side are the teachers, on the other the parent representatives who are also mostly teachers at other schools and of different grades. This kind of relationship is also neither bilateral nor democratic, and parents are even more affected by social pressure.

If there is consensus on goals, unity creates power. The more better-educated parents there are, the higher the probability of integrating others less familiar with the educational logic in the common pedagogical task -- the purpose of which, in principle, is to make the school more democratic and its knowledge available to all and not just a few privileged children.

The problem occurs when the equal partners (teachers, and parents who are also teachers) become antagonistic because they have conflicting purposes. The teachers fear losing their status as teachers (one which implies knowledge and power). The parent-teachers, who in this context are not teachers, want to make what is explicit in the Law a reality and become active members in the initiatives -- producers of ideas rather than merely reproductive and subservient.

Ethnographic records from this case study help to illustrate the constant interaction between the PA and the teaching staff, a continuous attempt to define and redefine interests and mutual territory.

> ● "*It's normal that, from time to time, we don't think in the same way.*" (PA mother, referring to the relationship with the teachers)
>
> ●"*We don't know the teachers who will be here next year. We don't know what the relationship will be like. On the other hand, and I'm not referring to us, we know that sometimes, even if a state law mandates the parents to collaborate, they don't know what their role is.*" (teacher)
>
> ●"*I don't see the elementary teacher any longer as a bogeyman who has to be feared. I know they are important, but they don't go beyond teaching to read and write, they are not teaching the child to take her first*

steps. The relationship school-family that I envision takes this into account." (mother and member of the PA)

- *"Parents and teachers have different interests."* (mother, member of the PA and high school teacher)

These are just a few records that, we hope, will contribute to an understanding of this report, which is dedicated to A Dialogue Between Cultures. The study can help to clarify the difficulties and ambiguities of the dialogue between cultures. If either of the two players embarks on a leader's project, simply to be accommodating or with a lack of interest or knowledge, the project will lack cultural richness and become monocultural. Or, alternatively, the participants from different cultures clash through their distinct social representations of what the school is and what it should be.

In a last analysis, the intercultural pedagogic utopia that would correspond to the integration of differences without the destruction of either the parent's culture or of the positivist culture of the school recedes. This pedagogy would be one of bilateral exchanges in which the parent goes to the school to contribute materially, and even spiritually, or to contribute in the classroom in the context of his/her profession. The teachers reach out to the community for support. They also visit the environment in which local and experiential learning takes place. They meet the families informally and get to recognize, know, and understand them better.

This bilateral exchange and mutual learning is what was missing from Pinhal do Rei and, certainly, at most other schools.

A Few Comments to Conclude

Administrative and Pedagogical Factors

One of the limiting factors in the project reported here was the change in faculty and in the director's position between the first and second year. The fact that 3/4 of the faculty was replaced from one year to the next had a negative effect on the process. The fact that the director was also replaced was equally negative. It is the director that represents the school to the outside world.

This factor became even more important than we originally thought. On the surface, the elementary school director's function is essentially administrative, but it ends up also being important, if not decisive, to the establishment of a non-traditional school or alternative school, especially as such a school tries to be open to the outside.

The politics of faculty placement in Portugal are rigid, based on fixed criteria from which the pedagogical concerns are put aside, and may easily produce perverse results. In this manner, any alternative pedagogical project -- individual or collective -- may be compromised by the simple fact that the teacher, or teachers involved, may be placed in a different school (even in the same neighborhood) in the following year.

Teachers, Parents, and Parent-Teachers

The present study brought attention to a phenomena which has not been studied, at least in Portugal, as far as we know: the significant presence of teachers in the parent associations. This presence can easily lead to an effective control by the PA.

This control may not even be intentional. It seems relatively easy for some parents to delegate their representation to other parent-teachers who have better mastery of the issues (aren't they also pedagogical professionals?), who know how to communicate with the teachers (don't they use the terminology that is socially accepted and legitimated by the school?), and who debate with the teachers from a position of equality (aren't they all officials of the same office?).

Another interesting aspect that was salient in our study is the fact (also not studied as far as we know) that the relationship between teachers and parent associations is essentially a relationship between elementary teachers and high school teachers, respectively. On one level, they are both education professionals. But, on another level, the two groups have different training and possess distinct academic degrees with historically different professional paths that have been translated to different social prestige. To what degree does the composition of the PA facilitate the quick and growing autonomy of the PA from the faculty? Would the relationship have been the same if there weren't teachers in the PA? What if the parent-teachers would have been, uniformly or primarily, also teachers of the same grades as these school teachers?

Still in regard to this situation, there are other questions that we have only enough room to sketch in this study: What is it, in practice, to be a parent-teacher? How does an individual in this situation act? How does a mother-teacher who declares that "parents and teachers have different interests" feel? How to interpret/act in the presence of this conflict of roles in a single person? How is the parent-teacher regarded by other parents? By the teachers? The parent-teacher is always a partner to either group but is she, simultaneously, someone who belongs on "the other side?" Is this double role a privileged bridge between these two worlds, or does the ambivalence of roles cause some loss of credibility by both groups? In addition, does the fact that, at the elementary level, we are before an exclusively female world (women teachers and mothers), as is the case in this study, have any influence in the process and, therefore, in the product?

The questions could go on. Certainly these questions about the teacher who is acting as a parent should be the focus for future research.

The School-Family Relationship, Interculturalism, and the Development of the Democratic School

The present research has shown beyond doubt that the relationship between the school and the family constitutes a relationship between cultures: the school culture (which is socially dominant and, therefore, is self-represented as the national culture) and the local culture or cultures (Iturra, 1990; Silva, 1993).

The educational authorities in general and teacher education in particular are now starting to discover this fact and to include inter/multicultural education in the lexicon of the official speech.

Despite the reforms in Western education systems, and in Portugal in particular, pointing toward education for citizenship and personal and social development, and toward the reduction of inequality in the school as the consequence of cultural differences, the "democratic school" still exists only in ideology, rhetoric, and intentions. In practice, the school lives in a state of tension between uniformity and diversity, between the tradition of the State's legitimate culture and the modernity of education and intercultural pedagogies.

The traditionalist and reproductive tendency is manifested in program uniformity, in the processes of evaluation, and in educators' preference for elaborate linguistic communication codes.

In contrast, intercultural education arises from the understanding that societies are multicultural, not only because of diverse backgrounds but also by the simple fact that dominant and dominated social classes have different representations, languages, grammars of perception and attitudes (Bourdieu, 1971).[5] Intercultural education therefore emphasizes the diversification of the processes of teaching and learning. Intercultural education springs from the belief that in education one is always, in some way, between cultures: different knowledge, value systems, different systems of representing and interpreting reality, habits, behaviors, etc. (Vieira, 1992).

If different cultures produce different cognitive, perceptive, and learning styles, then the school, if it wishes to be more democratic, has to opt for an intercultural pedagogy of exchange and sharing of experiences -- a sharing between the children and adults, students and teachers, parents and school, home and school, community and school, the various children, the various students and the various teachers.

The intercultural model implies a dialectic in constant contradiction: to assure difference and, simultaneously, not to sustain it. To preserve it, indeed, but also to reach beyond it (Clanet, 1990).[6] Interculturalism implies not only recognizing the differences, not just accepting them, but also -- what is more difficult -- transforming them into a source of new creations, innovation, and reciprocal enrichment.

The methodology of the model requires the comparison and contextualization -- the comparative method -- between the different worlds and socio-cultural contexts (Abdallah-Preceille, 1986).[7] Without comparing there is no learning or assimilation, and eventually there is just memorization and repetition. For this reason, there aren't universal norms to teach or a single way to learn. It is necessary for the teacher to know the student culturally for teaching to produce true learning.

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[5] Translation from the Portuguese

[6] Idem.

[7] Translation from the Portuguese

This is the lesson behind the example of Mariana, the mother who understands the world of the students from the inside, from the community's side, and who, for example, was able to improve the performance of Francisco, a gypsy boy who continued to have difficulties in math with his regular teacher. The question resides not in the inability of the teacher to teach as much as in the advantage of a member of the community who is able to help the child learn better, exactly because she is knowledgeable of the context which supports the child's understanding.

The intercultural lesson also calls attention to the logic of the monocultural functioning of the school that is like a web inside which the teacher moves. As a web, it makes it difficult for the teacher to adopt a different attitude and, therefore, to break away toward the creation of a different pedagogical practice, compatible with an inter/multicultural logic (Stoer, 1994).

In a last analysis, intercultural education corresponds to an attitude, a prospect for a new society that we may call post-modern, in which differences are integrated as cultural wealth rather than treated as social pathology and segregated. Multiculturalism is a social fact. Intercultural education is a policy, a pedagogy, or an attitude that aims to create a more democratic school and a society in which the citizen is not standardized into a single currency and the dominant classes do not govern dictatorially over the less dominant. When such schools and societies exist, parent-teacher-community partnerships will be fostered and will no longer be the kind of struggle we recorded at Escola Pinhal do Rei.

The Present Project: Perspective and Prospective

Since some time has passed since the conclusion of the project, it is possible to view the effort retrospectively. We have verified that some of the objectives were reached, namely the goal of bringing to the school parents who never showed up previously. The visits of these parents occurred mainly in those instances we have called informal.

Some of the mothers also turned up during "leisure time" to talk with Mariana, the mother who supervised those activities. Moreover, Mariana received many phone calls from other parents asking her for information and even advice about issues related to the school. Sometimes, these were parents whom she didn't know and who had obtained her number from other parents.

It is difficult to evaluate the effects on the children. We did not use any instruments or a control group to measure these effects. However, as we already mentioned, one teacher believed that participation in the LT by some of the children with more acute learning and social difficulties produced improvements in both areas. It is, however, dangerous to generalize.

This project has demonstrated some truths we had suspected: in a country such as Portugal, where there isn't a tradition of school-family cooperation, it is not enough to legislate. A culture of citizenship participation is not built by decrees. To develop new practices is always difficult. That was clear with the various social actors present here.

Parents, teachers, and parent associations are still learning to communicate with one another. Parent education is necessary; pre-service and continuing teacher training appears to be an urgent task. Schools, as organizations, should rethink their relationship with the outside world - with the families and communities. The parent associations have an important civic role to fulfill, preferably together with the school. That role is to reach out to all parents, without exception, and to avoid becoming a club where only a few members are welcome. If this isn't avoided, we run the imminent risk that the students getting help are those who need it the least and, therefore, we will continue to reinforce socio-cultural inequalities (Silva, 1993).

How to keep this project alive? Everything suggests that continuation will depend, once again, on the activism of both the faculty and of the members of the PA. Right now, there is already a certain tradition of participation in the school. This tradition is not strong, but it exists nevertheless, and a comparison with the majority of other schools shows it. The Parents' Association is a reality. It has become autonomous and assumed an important role. However, school and PA are both organizations, and organizations are made of human beings. If their composition changes suddenly and radically, as we know will happen within the PA in a maximum of four years (the duration of the elementary education cycle), the future of the school-family interaction becomes uncertain, despite the growing pressure of the political forces for the schools to open to the outside.

But, as a Portuguese proverb says: Hope dies last!

THE ROLE OF INDIAN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES IN THEIR CHILDREN'S LITERACY ACQUISITION

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> *"The home visitors have time and kiss the children"*
> —AN INDIAN PARENT

The history of Portugal is rich in multicultural contacts among peoples from Africa, India, America and Asia. However, its oldest former colony was in India, where Vasco da Gama, the famous sailor, took the Portuguese five hundred years ago.

After India received its independence, the population of the three main former Portuguese colonies (Goa, Damão and Diu) began to emigrate to Portugal and to Africa, primarily to Mozambique, a Portuguese colony in East Africa at the time. In 1961, the former colonies became part of the Indian Republic, and the flow of emigration to Mozambique increased substantially, thus forming an important Indian community there. With the independence of the latter colony in 1975, many in the Indian community emigrated to Portugal. Furthermore, families from Goa, Damão and Diu still emigrate directly to Portugal.

Thus, it is important to recognize the existence in Lisbon of an Indian community which is becoming larger. Although this population varies in socioeconomic status and lives in different parts of the town, a great majority of low- to middle-income families inhabit an area adjacent to a modern and wealthy urban part of Lisbon, where small, degradated houses were specially built in 1974 to accommodate immigrants from all of the former Portuguese colonies.

Primary School #1001

Primary School #1001[*] is situated in this urban area, and its population of about four hundred students (boys and girls) comes both from the degradated area (low to medium SES) and the modern buildings (medium SES). About forty percent of the students are immigrants, thirty-six percent of whom are Indians; the other four percent include children from African (Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde) and Chinese ethnic minorities. However, this balance is changing with an increase in the minority population and the diminishing of the European population as the Europeans living in this school area are getting older. Consequently there are fewer classes in the first grade (four) and second (five) than in the third and fourth grades (six classes each), and each class has fewer students (about 20) than average. Thus in the first grade, the Indian population is larger (49.3%) than in the rest of the school. The school has twenty-five teachers: two of them are the principal and the deputy, two are assistants, and another works in special education programs. In addition to belonging to the Institute for Responsive Education's League of Schools Reaching Out, the school has been involved in other educational projects.

The school building is relatively modern (built in the 1960s), is in good shape and is decorated with students' works. It includes two large playgrounds where children can be seen playing with one another without any restrictions of race or color. Often the Indian children and the mothers who bring them to school, come to meet them at lunch, or come to take them home wear their sarees. Parents and other members of either community come and play games in these playgrounds after school hours or during the weekends. Students also celebrate Christmas and Divali (their own Indian festival) together, but usually Indian mothers do not come to the Christmas festivities nor the non-Indian mothers to Divali. Also on weekends children from the Indian minority have classes in their own language. These classes were authorized by the Regional Services of Education and are promoted by the Indian community.

The teachers are happy with the high percentage of Indian children whom they consider nice and clever, good at Mathematics and at Visual Arts. Nevertheless, teachers complain about the rate of failure -- principally difficulties in reading and writing because of, in their opinion, the children's use of an Indian language, *Gujarati*, at home. They are in fact learning to read in their second language, Portuguese, which most of them do not understand or speak well.

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[*] Not a real name

Language Development

As language is acquired in the family, so is literacy. This perspective, which indicates that the process of reading and writing develops in the early years and that the child is an active processor of hypotheses, is quite recent (Teale & Sulzby,1987) and germane to this study. Therefore, the language spoken in the home, the cultural background, the availability of books, print awareness, adult reading habits, knowledge of the world, metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness about language (Bernstein,1961; Heath,1983; Chall,1983; Menyuk,1988) all condition the child's literate environment and the development of his/her roots of literacy, thus affecting the child's reading development. Comprehension in beginning reading comes through understanding that the printed symbols represent words that are used in everyday speech. So, both vocabulary enrichment and exposure to sight words and to a wide variety of children's literature are necessary for developing comprehension. According to Chant (1979), although parental involvement can provide this stimulus, the most important element is the time an adult (parent or teacher) takes to read to young children. Story reading constitutes a literacy event inasmuch as the narrative organization establishes the interaction between content and structural schemes, thus facilitating their acquisition. Furthermore, the recognition of surface marks and comprehension are facilitated (Frochot, 1987). Also, the literacy events are influenced by affective and social factors (Heath, 1983; Edwards, 1989), hence the advantage of home environments that provide positive experiences. However, Wells' study (1978), besides stressing the importance of home influences in motivation for reading, indicated that children are more sensitive to negative experiences than to positive ones. Thus, besides recognizing the importance of the home environment in a child's learning to read it is essential to aid teachers in working with parents to achieve optimal learning experiences for children and share responsibilities in the use of the media, homework and reading.

Families, Schools, and Language Development: What the Literature Says

For successful learning, "the crucial issue is not home or school, but the relationship between them" in order to develop what Seeley (1985) called a "productive learning relationship." Also, Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasized the need for supporting opportunities for development to occur not only in the child's primary setting (home, school), but also in the transition from one primary setting to another. A social, academic, and emotional interaction between home and school is most conducive to development.

Many of the most successful bilingual education programs were ones which established contacts with families and included parental involvement (Collins, Moles & Cross, 1982; Cetinsoy, 1983; Olmos, 1983). Problems diminished in importance when parental support for the school was high. Most recent research seems to indicate that low-income parents can be enlisted to cooperate with school to improve their children's achievement (Epstein, 1989; Davies, 1990). Even when families come from economically deprived backgrounds, they can work together with their children and, thus, learn together (Wells, 1988).

Given these results, other studies (Medeiros, 1983; Tizard et al., 1988; Goldenberg, 1989, 1990, 1991) confirmed the effects of parental involvement to improve early reading proficiency of children at risk of failure. However, one project designed to identify programs that help parents to support their children's literacy development concluded that although most of those programs involve low-income and minority groups, "very few focus on facilitation of literacy acquisition using parents as a resource" (Dickinson, 1988). Also, the results of a previous survey conducted in Portugal (Davies, et al, 1989) indicated that the majority of teachers in the area of Lisbon considered low-income, immigrant, and divorced parents to be "hard-to-reach" parents.

Research Questions

In keeping with the approach outlined above, this study poses two questions:

1) *Is it possible to help ethnic minority parents increase their understanding of school expectations and develop activities related to literacy development?*

2) *How will an enriched home environment affect their children's acquisition of reading?*

This project investigates whether it is possible to foster the literacy acquisition process of Indian children who have recently immigrated to Portugal and whose background is culturally different by helping their parents expand their cultural references and learn about literacy and the content and requirements of Portuguese schools.

METHODOLOGY

Thirty-three Indian children, corresponding to thirty-five percent of the school's Indian minority, participated in this project. All of the subjects (nineteen boys and fourteen girls; thirty-one age six, one age ten, one age twelve) were selected from the first grade of Primary School #1001. Some of them were learning Portuguese as a second language. All of the students came from working-class families who lived in the school area and occupied small, degradated houses. Most of the children came from stable, large families. The mode was two siblings, but often included grandparents or young uncles and aunts. Only two families in the experimental group and one in the control group were monoparental. Parents' educational levels were generally low and varied from illiteracy to twelve years of schooling (three parents). Almost all parents worked in unskilled or semi-skilled labour occupations such as masonry or in business. Almost all mothers (77%) worked at home, looked after their children, and took them to school. Their income was low, and several families had economic problems. The data were obtained through school records, and further information was gathered during the regular visits to the children's homes.

In this school all of the classes have about the same percentage of immigrant children. Therefore, in this project, two of the four existing classes were assigned to be the experimental group, and the other two were assigned to be the control group. The teachers discussed and decided which of them would have the experimental and the control groups.

Procedure

In addition to the students and their families, participants in this study included a researcher who designed the intervention program, six undergraduate students who assisted the researcher and acted as mediators between school and families, the teachers of the students in the experimental group, and the principal who supported the intervention. During the first part of the research, which was conducted over a period of approximately one year and three months, data were collected to plan the intervention program for parental involvement in the children's literacy and cultural development within the Portugese culture, and to organize regular workshops with the parents in the school facilities. Further data were collected in the beginning and at the end of the intervention to measure the literacy development of the students in the sample and to analyze the changes in parental involvement and in parents' attitudes and expectations about school. Participants also responded to a questionnaire issued by the League of Schools Reaching Out which had previously been translated and adapted to the Portuguese situation.

Literacy development

Students in the experimental and control groups were administered pre- and post-tests at the same time to determine the state of their emergent literacy and to serve as a measure in the research project. The Test of Early Reading Ability (TERA) (Reid, Hresko & Hammill, 1981) was used after having been adapted to the Portuguese language and culture and tested in public and private primary schools with children of different income levels. Its fifty items were designed to measure the child's ability to construct meaning from print and included (a) awareness of print in environmental contexts (meaning), (b) knowledge of the alphabet and its functions, and (c) understanding of the conventions involved in written language. Concerns regarding the equivalence of samples were investigated. As the initial scores were very low, researchers decided to use the same test as a post-test at the end of the one year treatment.

Home environment

Researchers interviewed parents in the experimental group to gather further information about the characteristics of the home environment which might facilitate children's learning to read, such as parents' time for their children, cultural habits, use of leisure time, academic aspirations and expectations, and type of parental stimulation for reading development. However, the interviews were semistructured in order to permit parents to freely express their own opinions. It was important to get information about the existence and nature of supports for literacy development.

Analysis of the interviews indicated the characteristics of the home environment of the children in the experimental group, summarized as follows:

Children's role in family activity: Most mothers (77%) stayed at home, and those who were employed came home at lunch time and had meals with their chidren. Most children watched television with their mothers. Although parents worked all day and one father often spent part of the week out of town, all of the families spent some time together in the evenings and on the weekends. Parents and children went out together on the weekends.

Children's role in the home: Taking care of the house was the mothers' responsibility, and no tasks were allocated to the children. Older children and fathers helped on occasion, if they wanted to. Parents thought their children were too young to participate in conversations, and only a few mothers asked for their children's opinions, then only on the subjects of clothes, small trips, and television programs. However, one mother said that she listened when her children did give their opinions. Furthermore, most mothers report that they paid attention to their children. Mothers gave presents on children's birthdays and on Christmas or other holidays. They gave presents on other occasions as well, and most of them gave toys as presents. Some parents also gave clothes and only a few gave books or magazines.

Low academic aspirations and expectations: Although most parents said that they would like their children to continue studying beyond the fourth grade, they did not specify the course their children would follow or the ultimate grade level they would attain. One parent even said, "There are people who can not take a degree." When asked, all but one mother agreed that schooling was important, but only fifty percent gave reasons for that assertion, such as the future of the child, "being somebody in life," continuing to go on studying. Two reacted affectively ("I like...," "I'd be sad if not..."). Only seven parents expressed any ideas about the occupation they would like their child to aspire to. A similar number of parents said that they knew their children's aspirations, which were lower than the parents'. But, even in these cases, they admitted that they had not yet discussed the matter with their children.

Lack of books for children: There was an almost universal lack of availability of books for children. Only two parents mentioned children's books. Although some mentioned other books like recipe or reference books, most had only magazines at home. Almost all mentioned pencils and paper. The adults' reading habits were limited to magazines and newspapers, which were generally bought by the men of the family. Only one father needed to read in his profession. Two said they coudn't read, and four could read only in Indian.

Gujarati, a native Indian language, was the preferred language of communication within the family, although six families reported that they also spoke Portuguese; only two families said they spoke Portuguese at home. Primarily mothers, but also one grandfather, a father, and a sister reported telling stories to their children in Indian, when they were younger. Some said they would listen to their children' stories, but two families aknowledged that they had never read or told any stories. Many (71%) emphasized that when children were at home they played among themselves, a smaller percentage (41%) indicated that they watched television, and twenty-four percent said that they studied a little.

Most literacy events occurred with the reading and writing of letters to relatives and friends in India, Mozambique, or London. However, three mentioned that they wrote in their mother tongue, and it can be expected that the others did the same. According to the families, 82% of the children were able to write their names before they began school, and 59% knew the names of the letters because they had attended kindergarten. Notwithstanding, only five parents (29%) had taught their children. Most either did not think that at-home teaching was important (29%) or thought teaching was the school's responsibility (71%). One father explained, "If it was so, they didn't have to go to school at all." Furthermore, only 41% agreed, when asked, that learning to read is important and only 47% said they encouraged their children to learn how to read. Also, the children's knowledge of the world was very limited because when they went out with their parents, they seldom visited places of cultural interest. Instead, they usually went to the park or visited other members of the family.

Reduced home-school relationships: Although most mothers took their children to school everyday, only one had taken the initiative to talk to the teacher, and 41% said they only met the teacher because she had asked them to do so. However, seven thought it was important to talk with the teacher "to know about the child" and the majority (53%) liked the school and thought it was good. All parents said that their children liked to go to school and that they spoke about what happened in school every day. If the children did not do so, mothers asked questions. When asked, most of the parents said they would like to know more about the school.

THE INTERVENTION

The students in the experimental group received the treatment designed to improve home-school relations and parental involvement in activities related to children's literacy development.

The treatment consisted of:

a) Regular sessions with parents held by the experimenter and the teachers involved in the program in the school facilities. The structure of these workshops involved parents in problem solving situations, and attitudes and home activities to foster literacy development were enhanced;

b) Regular home visits to deliver story books and monitor the reading of stories in a social-interactional/recreational context; and

c) Small trips with the home-visitors and parents to foster the children's knowledge of the cultural context of the Portuguese environment.

Teacher-parent sessions

During this period parents attended nine seventy-five minute workshops which were scheduled to be held at intervals of about forty-five days. The main purpose of these sessions was to increase productive home-school relationships to foster children's literacy development.

In each session participants were given a problem to solve. With the exception of the first meeting, organized to explain the goals and procedures that would be followed during the experiment, the scheme of the workshops was consistent: (a) welcome and feedback from families about the home activities suggested in the previous session; (b) introduction to a problem; (c) problem solving with practice; and (d) offer of reading materials.

The problem was presented either orally or with the help of videotaped sketches or other supporting visual aids. This approach was chosen to facilitate comprehension in a multicultural setting, to illustrate an authentic situation in a pedagogical manner, to prompt discussion, and to engage the parents in the problem solving situation. Thus, the discussion was enhanced and parents (or siblings or other relatives) were stimulated to offer suggestions of possible solutions (home activities). The suggested activities were then simulated and practiced by the participants. After a discussion, parents were given a **memorandum** with the specific points focused in the session (in Portuguese and also translated into *Gujarati* by one of the mothers) (Figures 1a and 1b) and a report calendar (Figure 2). Parents were then expected to attempt with their children the three or four activities suggested in the memorandum for the between-the-session period. They were also asked to fill in the report calendar weekly, indicating if they had done activities "every day," "some days," or "had forgotten." They were to bring the report to the next session.

During these sessions, participants explored the following kinds of questions and suggested the related home activities:

1) How can we foster the process of acculturation to country and school? *Suggestions included family trips to places of cultural interest; family interaction about TV programs in Portuguese; and the advantages of speaking a second language.*

2) How can we help with reading? *Participants suggested frequent reading or story-telling.*

3) How can we encourage family conversation? *Suggestions included playing oral games involving the development of vocabulary, memory and creativity.*

4) How can we increase print awareness without books in the house? *Participants suggested using "home books" -- available food packages, for example, can be used for practicing letter identification and word identification.*

5) How can we help with homework? *Responses emphasized the importance of asking questions and talking about homework.*

6) How can we improve the use of leisure time? *Participants suggested sharing home tasks, indicated places of interest for visits, and simulated games to be played by the family.*

7) How can we improve television viewing? *Limit time; wat[illegible]lucative television (Sesame Street / Portuguese version); have the family watch programs in Portuguese; hold conversations about those programs.*

8) Why is learning to read important? *Participants discussed the importance of contributing to a favourable home environment and the value of talking to children's teachers.*

9) Why is self-esteem important? *Participants enacted a role play illustrating two different situations: trust and support vs. punishment and distrust.*

Figure 1a. Memorandum for parents

LEARNING TO READ...

- **Reading readiness begins at home**
- Parents who read and have books around instill the desire for reading

SO:

Buy some books and magazines.

Take your child to the library.

Read or tell him/her stories!

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

FIGURE 1b. *Gujarati* version

ભાષાની શરૂઆત

બાળકોને બાળપણ થી જ શીખવાય છે.
માબાપ વારંવાર ચોપડીઓ વાંચે કે
તેના ઘરમાં ચોપડીઓ હશે તો
બાળકોને વાંચવાનો ઉમંગ થાય.

ભેટવા માટે:

ચોપડીઓ અને ચિત્રોના ખરીદો...
તમારા દિકરા ને લાઇબ્રેરીમાં લઈ જાઓ.
વાંચો જાણવા વાંચન કરો...

Figure 2. Report Calendar

		Every day	Some days	Forgotten
Week	I bought a storybook or a magazine	☐	☐	☐
from ______	I took my child to the library	☐	☐	☐
to ______	I listened to my child reading and asking questions	☐	☐	☐
	I told him/her a story at bedtime	☐	☐	☐
Week	I bought a storybook or a magazine	☐	☐	☐
from ______	I took my child to the library	☐	☐	☐
to ______	I listened to my child reading and asking questions	☐	☐	☐
	I told him/her a story at bedtime	☐	☐	☐
Week	I bought a storybook or a magazine	☐	☐	☐
from ______	I took my child to the library	☐	☐	☐
to ______	I listened to my child reading and asking questions	☐	☐	☐
	I told him/her a story at bedtime	☐	☐	☐
Week	I bought a storybook or a magazine	☐	☐	☐
from ______	I took my child to the library	☐	☐	☐
to ______	I listened to my child reading and asking questions	☐	☐	☐
	I told him/her a story at bedtime	☐	☐	☐

Home visits

To modify the nature of the literacy events, it was important not only that children had their own story books, but also that adults provided scaffolding for book reading. Parents were encouraged and helped to read stories to their children in a social-interactional/recreational context. The purpose of the home visits was twofold: a) to increase the availability of books in the home, facilitating the reading of stories; and b) to remind parents of the specific activities suggested in the previous teacher-parent session to help their children at home. Accordingly, mediators visited each of the seventeen families in the experimental group regularly. They accomplished a total of 119 home visits (an average of seven visits to each family) during the intervention period.

The implementation of reading stories followed a pre-established scheme designed to provide adult time, language models, meta-linguistic awareness, vocabulary enrichment, knowledge of the world, and also to foster adult reading habits. Thus, in the first visit, a home visitor, in the presence of a parent, would give the new book to the child to let him/her preview the book. Then, sitting adjacent to child and allowing him/her to hold the book, the home visitor would read the entire story, ask the child both questions on the book's content and decontextualized questions, describe pictures, link items in text to the child's life, familiarize the child to print conventions, point to words and letters, and have the child identify letters and words. Eventually, the child was asked to draw a picture about the story and then describe it. In cases of illiteracy (sometimes Portuguese illiteracy) of both parents, a sibling was urged to read stories to the child.

Field trips

The treatment also consisted of small trips with the children. They were accompanied by the respective home-visitor (mediator), and parents, siblings, and teachers were invited to join them. The purpose was to foster the acculturation process of the children and their families and, also, to enlarge their knowledge of the Portuguese cultural context by developing their vocabulary and experiences.

Three areas of experience were chosen: the world of culture, the world of work, and the entertainment business. The children made five trips altogether. They visited the Museum of Natural History, where they watched an exhibition on dinosaurs, and the Navy Museum, where they could follow the origin and development of the links between the Portuguese and Indian cultures. They visited OIKOS, an exhibition about crafts from all around the world, which took place in a large plaza, and they visited a restaurant to witness the preparation of Portuguese food and (for those who wished) to taste it. They also visited a television station and had the opportunity to participate in a well-known children's program, which a child's family could later watch.

DATA ANALYSIS AND OUTCOMES

Throughout the data collection process, information was gathered from four sources: (a) parent participation in the sessions, (b) reports from the mediators on home visits and trips, (c) analysis of questionnaires, and (d) testing of the children.

Parental involvement

Parents did involve themselves consistently in the three above-cited required situations (workshops, home visits, trips).

In the workshops at school

Reports of the sessions with the parents offered specific details about frequency of attendance, the member of the family who attended the meeting, the type of participation, and participants' comments. Participants were primarily mothers, but fathers and siblings also participated in the sessions. The attendance rate varied from 41% to 82% (at the end of the school year) throughout the nine meetings that took place. In the first two meetings of the second year the percentage of parents was lower because the class had a new teacher who did not adequately inform the parents of the meetings. The mean rate of attendance was 63%.

Teachers were surprised at the attendance and involvement of families in the workshops, and also acknowledged that parents came to talk to them frequently. One teacher reported that one mother whose son was sick asked how she could help him with his schoolwork at home. The teacher believed that this type of volunteerism had never happened before with this "close community." The other teacher reported a similar case when one of the children had travelled to India. They both acknowledged that students were "less shy and more communicative."

Parents spontaneously said that they enjoyed the meetings and became less and less shy. Most fathers came to the first meeting, either alone or with their wives. As mothers became more confident they started to attend by themselves. One mother who did not understand Portuguese always came with her oldest daughter. Others came in groups and helped one another with the language. About fifty percent would somewhat proudly bring the report calendars. One mother translated the Memoranda into *Gujarati*. Only two children's parents never came to the meetings: one of the children lived with her widowed mother and the other's parents were separated.

In the home visits

The home visitors reported that the monitoring of reading stories had been gratifying experiences. The children looked forward to their coming and the parents welcomed them, sometimes with food and presents. Some parents even decided to finish their jobs in the market earlier so that they might attend the home visits. These were the same parents who at the beginning were difficult to meet or had even rejected the possibility of being visited in their own homes. This change occurred because, as one mother put it, they had realized that the home visitors were not only interested in their children but, unlike the teachers, were also fond of the children and had plenty of time for them. They appreciated that the home visitors always greeted the children with a kiss. Also, most parents bought new books for their children, who were proud to take them to school.

In the trips

More mothers than fathers participated in the trips, but both enjoyed their participation. They dressed very elegantly for the occasions and mentioned that they were happy to have opportunities not only to go beyond the areas where they lived but also to help their children learn better. Although invited, teachers accompanied the children on one occasion only.

Literacy development

According to the teachers, the reading performance of the students in the experimental group was better than their mathematics performance. This discrepancy was apparently unusual.

The literacy development was assessed in the beginning and at the end of the first school year. The post-test (TERA) was administered individually to all thirty-three students. Preliminary concerns regarding the equivalence of samples were first investigated. A MANOVA was computed which indicated that there was no significant effect of the interaction of the variables group and sex [T2= .07343, Aprox. F(3,28) = .68536, p>.05]. There were no significant differences between the pre-test global scores of the groups [T2 = .20534, Aprox. F (3,28) = 1.91652, p > .05] either, although the mean scores of both boys and girls of the control group were higher (Table 1). This result was expected because one boy and one girl of the latter group were older (twelve and ten years of age respectively) and had already been initiated to reading and writing in the English language.

The MANOVA comparing the scores of pre and post-test indicated highly significant differences for the two experimental groups taken together [T^2 = 5.49763, Aprox. F (3,27) = 49.47864, p < .001].

Table 1 Test scores (Means and Standard Deviations)

Group	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	N
Experimental	3.7647 (2.7279)	26.3529 (8.4553)	17
Control	5.7500 (6.2129)	14.9375 (10.5607)	16

The significant interaction between the group (experimental vs. control) and the pre-test vs. post-test due to the variable group indicated that the experimental group improved on the literacy test significantly more than the control group. The mean scores can be seen from the above cited Table 1, revealing a significant difference between the gain scores of the two groups [T^2 = 1.01758, Aprox. F(3,27) = 9.15824, p< .001]. The effect of the group was also significant [T^2 = .70535, Aprox. F(3,27) = 6.34812, p <.005]. To examine the eventual effect of sex, this variable was also included in the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) which revealed that there was no effect of sex alone [T^2 = .08378, Aprox. F (3,27) = .31452, p > .05].

Given the results, a further analysis of the test was carried out to examine the three variables included in the test (V1 - Meaning, V2 - Alphabet Knowledge and V3 - Conventions). It was found that all these variables, but mainly Meaning, had contributed to the global gains and that significant differences existed in all of them between the experimental and the control groups. Thus, for the variable V1 (Meaning), significant effects were verified due to test [F (1,29) = 1255.33, p < .001]; due to group [F (1,29) = 195.07, p < .05]; and due to the interaction test by group [F (1,29) = 241.80, p < .001]. For the variable V2 (Alphabet Knowledge), significant effects were verified due to test [F (1,29) = 529.33, p < .001]; and due to the interaction test by group [F (1,29) = 78.61, p < .001]. Finally for the third variable (V3 - Conventions), significant effects were also verified due to test [F (1,29) = 26.01, p < .001]; due to group [F (1,29) = 8.81, p < .005]; and due to the interaction test by group [F (1,29) = 10.09, p < .005].

Thus statistical analysis of the obtained data indicated that there were significant differences between the performance of the students who had followed the intervention program of parental involvement in their literacy development and those who had not.

The results of the analysis of variance confirm that, at the end of the intervention, the scores of the experimental group were much higher than those of the control group, although the latter group's results had initially been higher. The achievement of the experimental group in the literacy test was higher globally and in all the three variables of the test, mainly in the V1 (Meaning), the develpment of which had been more emphasized by the program. There were no differences between the literacy development of boys and girls.

Changes in parental attitudes

The analysis of the results of the questionnaires issued by the League of Schools Reaching Out and applied in the beginning of the study had confirmed the analysis of the interviews in relation to the following aspects of the home environment:

Need for cooperation with teachers: The great majority of parents thought they could and should cooperate with teachers in their children's education and they trusted their children's teachers. Nevertheless, they acknowledged they needed to learn specific activities to help their children at home.

Reduced home-school communication. Parents' opinions were less positive and the rate of non-response had increased. Most parents said that they were seldom or never contacted by the school, although they felt at ease about talking to the teachers.

Positive attitude towards school. On the contrary, their attitude towards the school was very positive. They thought it was doing good work and they felt welcome in the school building. However, they had doubts about their own participation in the school activities and, again, the non-response increased (26%). Nevertheless, they didn't mention many reasons: work (50%), schedule (31%), and not being invited (27%) were suggested reasons. Only a few mentioned previous negative experiences. It is important to note that 39% did not collaborate with the school at home, simply because they did not know how to, but they did not blame the school for that.

Low academic aspirations and expectations. The expectations were generally low and the rate of non-response was very high. Only 20% said that they had an idea about what teachers had done to influence their children's learning positively. The majority had no idea of their own role either, but 40% of parents felt that they had influenced their children's learning positively and explained how. They felt more at ease about the use of leisure time and 60% were able to give examples of activities.

These data seemed to indicate that the home environment was receptive and that they were not hard-to-reach parents. Their opinion of school was positive. Mothers stayed at home and were aware of their role in their children's education. However, after the implementation of the program the comparative analysis of the questionnaires indicated changes related to the four identified categories between the responses at the beginning and at the end of the intervention.

Productive learning relationship between parents and teachers

The majority of parents who agreed they would talk freely with the teachers about children's learning problems increased from 58% to 94%, from the pre-administration of the instrument to the post-administration at the end of the intervention. Also, more parents agreed that they would cooperate in finding solutions to problems. Their trust in the teachers increased from 82% to 95% too, which was confirmed by the fact that now all the parents acknowledged that teachers promoted the best learning environment. However in the pre-test fewer parents reported that they would receive or give suggestions to improve children's achievement or that they helped their children with school work. Surprisingly, more parents said they needed to learn concrete ways of helping children's learning at home.

Confirming these opinions, a higher percentage of parents in the post-test agreed that they had different educational objectives than the teachers. However, in the post-test fewer parents felt that they were not certain of teachers' support or of their teaching capacity. Also, in the post-test, a larger percentage indicated that they had no difficulty in meeting with the teachers to talk about their children. It is important to emphasize that the mean non-response rate diminished from 15% to 1.5% on these items in the questionnaire. This seems to indicate an increase in parent's self-assurance.

In relation to the parents' participation in school activities, the number of parents who had said that they had never talked to the teacher nor participated in parent meetings or any other actvities diminished, and the number who said that they had participated more than doubled.

It is also important to emphasize that the failure to answer rate (25% in the pre-test) disappeared after the intervention, which not only makes these data more reliable but also indicates parents' self-assurance. Furthermore, this change has been consistent throughout the four categories of responses, indicating that, at the end of the intervention program, parents felt more assured in answering the questionnaires.

Thus, with the opportunity to meet more often with the teachers, parents' trust towards them and their teaching abilities increased, and parents had a more positive image of the teachers. Also, parents' self-assurance increased and became more sincere. However, they also became more aware of their own capacities and needs to fulfill their role in the learning partnership.

Communication between Home and School

In relation to this second category the opinions were initially less positive. The majority (51%) had disagreed that they had ever been informed about their children's progress, and only 32% said that they had been informed. In the second response, more parents (40%) not only acknowledged that they had been informed, but the number of those who had met the teacher to talk about the child had doubled, which seems to indicate that teachers' habits had changed less than the parents'. They felt more at ease talking about the children's home lives. The difference is even greater when they talked about problems and expectations, although 13% of parents compared to 2% in the first response admitted that they felt "very little at ease" in both situations. But here again, the previous non-response rate (30%) disappeared completely.

We may conclude that the communication between home and school has increased mainly because parents contacted the teacher more often to be informed about children's progress in school. Thus, most parents felt less shy not only about talking about children's home lives but also about their problems and expectations.

Aspirations and expectations

The data analysis of the first response indicated that the expectations were generally low, and although 42% of the parents said they cared about the educational aspirations of their child, 46% said they did not. In the second response the aspirations were higher: 63% said they cared. The non-response rate had been very high when parents were asked their opinions about either the parents' (60%) or the teachers' (80%) positive influence on children's learning. In relation to the teachers' influence, the non-response rate declined from 80% to 13%, which means that they were actually more informed, but many doubts persisted. Furthermore, most of the examples they gave were related to the intervention program (sessions with parents, small trips, story reading). Eighteen per cent felt confident enough to judge the teachers ("Teacher L... encouraged students to learn and the new teacher is doing the same now" or "This new teacher does not teach well: She doesn't repeat the questions when the children are absentminded and this upsets the children," or "She teaches well and gives homework").

All parents answered the questions about parental positive influence on the post-test, there were no non-response s compared to 60% non-response in the pre-test. More parents felt they helped with homework, and explained how: "I clarify his doubts, he understands and after that he has no more doubts." They also mentioned the use of television to improve their knowledge of Portuguese. Their interaction with the literacy development increased, too ("I ask her to read and write things").

Parents were more at ease when they responded to the use of time in the home and, consequently, the non-response rate decreased to 40%. All parents responded about the use of leisure time -- most indicated that they controlled the use of time, giving priority to schoolwork and educational television, and encouraging the children's sense of responsibility ("I let him play because he has the sense of responsibility to do his homework" or "Homework is first, there is always time to play"). Only one mother admitted she did not control her son ("He watches TV and is lazy to do his homework"). They also realized the importance of speaking Portuguese well ("We try to involve him in activities with other kids of his age in order to develop his communication skills in Portuguese").

We may conclude that parents' expectations were slightly higher. They realized the value of academic education but they needed more information about teachers' positive influence. Yet, they realized that their own influence can be positive, giving examples of some of the activities they had practiced.

Attitude towards school

As expected, parental attitudes towards school were still more positive at the end of intervention.

POLICY INFLUENCES AND RESULTS

Unfortunately, these results have had no great influence in the policies of the school so far, although both the principal and the teachers involved were impressed by what had been achieved.

The teachers' attitudes towards parents became more positive: they think parents do try to do what the teacher asks them to; and more thoughtful: they advertised the attending hours and wrote down all the information in the children's exercise books. They also acknowledged that something ought to be done, but they considered that that was not their job: perhaps someone from the Ministery could do it, or perhaps they would if they got better conditions or further payment for that purpose. Thus, they did not think they had time or place to organize workshops with parents, although they realized that those sessions would increase parental involvement. Teachers would not even consider the idea of home visiting, although one of them indicated resentment toward the success of the mediators (home visitors).

The principal was always very supportive and appreciated the researchers' interest in the school, and also the interest from other departments of the Ministry such as the ***Secretariado Coordenador dos Programas de Educação Multicultural*** and the ***Departamento de Educação Básica - Publicação para Formadores e Animadores/Monitores,*** which published articles on the school and on the project. However, she was aware that the teachers were not willing to do extra work, unless they were given adequate resources or had the support of a facilitator.

Thus, the difficulties in changing policies arise from a lack of funds and lack of support from a facilitator.

LESSONS LEARNED

These difficulties notwithstanding, the results seem positive and some important lessons were learned:

Indian minority parents are not "hard-to-reach." This research indicated that parents from the Indian minority were not hard-to-reach parents as they had been considered by many teachers in previous studies.

Parents' attitudes toward themselves and toward the school have changed. As the pre-and post-questionnaires indicated, parents' self-assurance has increased, and they have gained confidence to express their opinions and even to disagree, when beforehand they just kept their silence. They also changed their habits in order to welcome and attend the home visitors, to visit places of interest with their children, and to buy story books for them.

Parents became involved in literacy activities. The results supported the notion that minority parents can be helped to change their attitudes and become involved in activities such as: (a) attending workshops at school; (b) recognizing the importance of availability of print in the home; (c) reading stories with children; (d) practicing oral games; and (e) using media, mainly television, to foster second language acquisition.

Parental involvement in emergent literacy diminished the rate of failure. The former activities, in turn, improved the children's cultural and linguistic background which was, according to the teachers, the main cause of their failing in school. Part of their cultural capital resides in familiarity with the school content, and the cultural events and places that make up cultural capital in the Portuguese setting. Therefore, it is not enough to have reading material, such as these families have. But, it is also important to focus on the types of material (children's books) and the events and places (for example, the small trips) that will help the children acquire cultural capital in the new country's context. The intervention clearly helped the Indian families acquire more cultural capital.

Thus, the influence of parental involvement in emergent literacy and the effect of the latter on the acquisition of reading seems a powerful resource to be used to diminish the high rate of failure among the Indian minority population in Portugal.

Teachers changed their attitudes somewhat. The teachers of this study realized that their attitude towards the productive involvement of Indian parents could be changed and, in the workshops at school, they began to show these parents how they could help their children at home. For the first time, parents acknowledged that teachers had contacted them for positive reasons.

Parents became more demanding. In relation to school, parents' attitudes were more positive and they continued to trust teachers' efficacy. However, they also became more demanding about cooperation with teachers not only in terms of educational objectives and values, but also in terms of learning specific forms of helping their children at home. Furthermore, parents began to take the initiative of contacting the teacher, although some still thought it was difficult to do so. They demonstrated interest in the workshops at school and they indicated fewer reasons for not participating in them. More parents said they helped with homework and their aspirations toward children's academic education have increased.

This may indicate that they have been alerted to the issue: that they have become more aware of their own role in children's schooling, that they have more information about what teachers can do to have a positive influence on their children's learning. However, this may also indicate that once alerted to the issue, parents realized that what has been done was not enough.

Parents trusted the home visitors. This may also have been the reason for their feeling more confident judging or criticizing the teachers, and for showing their trust to the mediators who "have time and kiss the children." When the mediators gave parents the questionnaires and said good-bye, the parents were very sorry to see the project end. One mother had tears in her eyes. However, they promised to continue with the program, and the mediators could see the chidren had acquired many more story books. Although, at first, families were not very enthusiastic about being visited, the success of the home-visiting program must be emphasized: without the mediators who visited the children regularly and showed affection and respect to them, parents wouldn't have come to school so willingly, and the successful implementation of their involvement in their children's literacy development might not have been achieved.

Two further points must also be emphasized. First, according to the cultural concept of family and because of the mothers' limited skill in Portuguese, other members of the family can be productively involved in Portuguese literacy activities with the children. Second, teachers' attitudes need to be changed in order to contact the Indian parents more often to discuss educational values and schoolwork practices. Such contacts, if the language problems are minimized, can show affection to the parents and the children. The parents have shown that they will manage their limited knowledge of Portuguese by bringing with them either a relative or a neighbor who knows Portuguese better.

COMMENTS ON COMMON THEMES

a) Who was reached?

The intended people were affected: Indian minority children improved their literacy development and their reading capacity; their parents, who were considered "hard to reach," were reached after all and changed their practices and attitudes. They have become aware of the situation and thus more self-assured and demanding, but also more able to help their children. Thus there is evidence that, given the opportunity, an impact on equity can be achieved. Teachers came to realize that Indian minoriy parents were not "hard-to-reach" parents and could be helped to positively affect their children's literacy development.

b) Teacher professionalism

Teachers were the least involved in the project, and there were differences among the three of them. These differences pertained not to tenure but to teachers' stages of mastery and degrees of confidence. The main barrier to the further involvement of teachers is their strong belief both in their traditional role "inside" the classroom and in the "limits" of their schedule. One teacher was younger and did not have tenure in the school, but her attitudes changed most positively: she joined a trip with the children, realized how parents and children had changed, and commented often about the changes. She was very sorry because at the end of the first year she had to move into another school and abandon the project. The new teacher was an older, more experienced teacher. Only a semester was left, and she did not get involved with the project. The teacher of the other experimental class was also an experienced teacher. Her attitudes changed as she realized that parents could be positively involved in children's work, and she started to help them to do so. She resented the home visitors' contacts and popularity with "her" students and their families, but she still did not feel she ought to do anything beyond the limits of her professionally-allocated time. This situation is obviously related to teacher education and the lack of professional development. The problem could be positively addressed if two areas were changed -- teachers' initial education and institutional policies in school.

c) Use of the common instrument

The common instrument, the questionnaire issued by the League of Schools Reaching Out, was not extensively changed for the school's culture. However, it was useful as a pre- and post-test assessment of the parents' change of attitudes. The most important feature was not any particular item, but the dramatic diminishing of the non-response rate between the first and second responses.

d) Sustaining the project

Although most parents have been involved, a few mothers were particularly interested, and one mother was especially active in translating the materials and in informing the other mothers. Although the principal had always been very enthusiastic, it is feared that the project will not be sustained. Three reasons may be given: (a) lack of time and support from the facilitator, (b) lack of funds to pay the mediators for the home visiting, and (c) the moving of one of the teachers into another school. However, the researchers believe that the parental attitudes towards school and involvement in the children's school work, developed through this project, will persist.

e) Personal comments

This case study ws child-centered: Our ultimate goal was to improve children's learning and development. This goal has been achieved, as the significant differences between the score gains between the experimental and control groups indicate, through the enrichment of literacy events in their home environment. In order that their achievement might continue to improve, it was important to have found out that the empowerment of their parents had also been achieved.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE THREE PORTUGUESE CASE STUDIES

By Ramiro Marques

Need for a Coherent Policy Framework

The case studies confirmed the findings of other studies (Davies et al, 1989; Davies, Marques, and Silva, 1993) and the views of experts that schools in Portugal need a coherent policy framework to support local efforts. We have a pressing need for a system to provide the structural and financial links between state, district, school level and classroom practices and between the fragmented systems of health, welfare, social service, cultural agencies and schools.

Incorporating a Participatory Model

Our cases point to the need for further work to be done to incorporate the participatory model of partnership, so that families can be seen as partners and can cooperate with schools, have a voice in school affairs, and be able to make a difference in schools. Most activities of parent involvement belong to one of these three models: 1) the compensatory model: the school is expected to compensate for the disadvantages of the home background; 2) the communication approach: the role of parents is recognized and home-based actions are expected to support the schools' work if the level of communication is increased; 3) the participatory model: going beyond communication strategies to recognize that teachers and parents can cooperate for the benefit of schools and children. Most activities implemented in Portuguese schools are limited to the communication model.

Parents as Educators

In Portugal we need to emphasize the educational roles of parents and make a distinction between the administrative roles and the educational roles. Most Portuguese schools emphasize representing parents on school councils, fund-raising activities, and voluntary parents' associations. Their impact on learning is likely to remain low, as desirable as the activities might be for other purposes. When parents exercise administrative roles they are concerned with groups of children rather than with a particular child. The "parents as educators" approach includes home learning activities, helping children with homework, reinforcing student motivation, and reinforcing good and healthy habits and attitudes. When parents exercise educational roles they are concerned with particular children and emphasize learning and achievement. It is not possible to mandate parents' educational roles, because they are matters of culture and habits. Nevertheless, projects like this one are effective tools to promote parents' educational roles.

Parent Education

Parents need information and knowledge so that they can develop skills as educators and can exercise educational roles at home -- supervise homework, increase educational expectations, reinforce student motivation and study habits. In some instances the cases suggest that many low-income parents do not exercise their educational roles. We need parent education programs especially designed for low-income groups. The elementary school in Lisbon has shown that home visiting is one of the best interventions for reaching low-income parents and is therefore a good way to improve parent education.

Introduce Parent Choice

We need to introduce choice plans in Portuguese schools, so that parents can have voice in school issues and can push for change and school restructuring (Marques, 1995). Portuguese teacher unions are suspicious of choice plans. They say that choice will increase inequality and will destroy the public system of education. However, parents' associations tend to agree with choice plans. The Portuguese Confederation of Parents (CONFAP) has been arguing in favor of vouchers and uncontrolled choice plans (choice not only among public schools but also among private schools). Some Portuguese educators (Marques, 1995; Silva, 1995) support controlled choice plans and say that effective choice plans can improve the quality of education without jeopardizing equity goals.

Teacher Training Programs about Schools and Families

One of the problems we face when trying to generalize family involvement in schools is that many teachers lack information and knowledge about this topic. In the last three years, we have helped to increase interest among universities and colleges about the field of school-family partnerships. However, much more must be done, so that every teacher is able not only to introduce family involvement programs in the school, but also to work well with parents' representatives on the pedagogical council and the school board.

Partnerships between Elementary Schools and Colleges

These three case studies have shown that an external facilitator from a nearby college is crucial for initiating and sustaining the project. The facilitator provides not only training and information, but also guidance, coordination and support. The schools that make connections with colleges can profit from college resources and get more visibility for what they have been doing. These three Portuguese schools received public attention for their work, because the interventions and conclusions were reported in educational journals and books.

These projects are small case studies. We cannot generalize from them. However, some patterns can be inferred:

- Connections between schools and local governments help schools to obtain additional resources;
- Working with an external facilitator helps teachers with planning, training and evaluation; and
- Family involvement in school is an effective way of getting more community support for a school's efforts.

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Chapter 4

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS IN SPAIN: A CASE STUDY

By Raquel-Amaya Martínez González, Ph.D.

> *"The team provides an opportunity to discuss many interesting issues which would never have been discussed at the school if this study had not been performed."*
>
> — A TEACHER

1. THE SETTING

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Spain has experienced great changes in the last two decades. Its economy, predominantly rural and agricultural during the 1960s, has changed to an industrial one; consequently, many people have moved from the country to the city and have exchanged their farming jobs for jobs in the secondary and tertiary sectors. Moreover, the political change from a dictatorial regime to a democracy has generated great social changes and has allowed the country to become a member of the European Community.

One of the most evident social achievements that resulted from these changes has been the improvement of education. Since 1970, when the Ley General de Educación (General Education Law) was passed, Primary Education has been compulsory in Spain and free for public schools. After this law, other laws were developed to increase the quality of children's education; the most recent, Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo (LOGSE), is still being implemented.

The main objective for making Primary Education compulsory and free for public schools is to make sure that all children, boys and girls from all social classes, have the same opportunities to learn and to develop their social and intellectual abilities and their personalities. In doing so, education has become the most important means for providing citizens with equal social opportunities.

The most recent Spanish education law, LOGSE, was passed on October 3, 1990. Its main objective is to reorganize the structure and content of the education system, so that it may become more suitable to the new reality in Spain. According to this law, the formal education system is organized in the following levels: Infant Education (0 to 6 years old; not compulsory), Primary Education (6 to 12 years old; compulsory), Compulsory Secondary Education (12 to 16 years old; it includes high school and technical school of a medium level of formation), and Superior Technical Education and University Education (from 16 years old, both not compulsory) (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 1989).

POLICY CONTEXT AFFECTING FAMILY-COMMUNITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

The Spanish Constitution (1978) (Arts. 27.3, 27.5, 27.7) outlines the rights and obligations parents have to participate in the education of their children: the right to direct the moral education of their children and the right to participate in the management of public schools.

Parents' involvement in schools has been legislated in Spain since 1970 through several Education Laws. LOGSE has as one of its objectives to promote cooperation between parents and school staff in order to increase the quality of children's education. This law encourages *curricular reform* based on the principle of decentralization: Every school should adapt the curriculum to its own needs, for the children and the community it serves. This reform implies, then, that the whole school community, parents included, shall take part in this process of adaptation and organization of the curriculum, particularly in the areas of infant and primary education.

The reform recognizes the importance of family-community-school partnership in Spain. However, no evident changes have yet emerged in the kinds of partnership and practices that schools have always maintained with parents. Parents' associations at schools and parents' participation in school councils are still the main activities parents perform in the context of the schools. These are important areas of involvement, but they do not always represent real and friendly partnership. Some schools have been able to develop real relationships in some areas, but many others have failed to do so.

SCHOOL CONTEXT: THE LAVIADA SCHOOL

One of the most recent programmes to enhance cooperation between parents and teachers in Spain is taking place at the Laviada school in the Asturias region. This experience represents the first time that parents, teachers, students and representatives from Oviedo University have sat down together in the school to discuss the state of parent-teacher cooperation and to organize activities to improve it.

The Laviada school is located in a central area of the industrial city Gijón, on the north coast of Spain, in the region of Asturias. Asturias is an important industrial area (coal mines, iron and steel, chemistry, milk products, and cider); its inhabitants number about 1,127,007 (3% of the total Spanish population) (Gran Enciclopedia Larousse, 1988). Gijón is the second most important city in Asturias after the capital, Oviedo.

The Laviada school is located in a central area of Gijón, which offers many tertiary sector activities and facilities: transportation (buses, railway), shops, restaurants, and cafeterias, administrative buildings, and secondary schools. Families which send their children to this school have, on average, a medium income level, which is consistent with the level of education parents have: 40% primary education, 41% secondary education and 19% university education. The school serves a largely middle class community. Most of the children are Spanish, but there are a few with Asian backgrounds whose parents run restaurants in the area. Although some children live in a monoparental family, most of them live with both parents.

The school covers the eight grades of the previous but still active Spanish primary education and the new infant education. The enrollment for the 1992-93 academic year, when this study began, was 813 pupils. The school's organization is good, and teachers, in general, are open to developing innovative programs. In fact, several new programmes are being developed: ATENEA (related to the introduction of computers in the classroom), Early French, environmental education, and this collaborative international project, proposed by the Institute for Responsive Education and the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning.

There are thirty-eight teachers, most of them women. The principal is male, as are the secretary and the school organizer; these three men are part of the school's managing board. All three were interested in developing this project, and both the principal and the school organizer have played active roles by serving on the action-research team created for the study. Their presence and interest have been keys for its development and success.

Teachers in the school are aware of the concerns of their community because many of them live near the school, within the community. In fact, some of them actively participate in the neighborhood club or association. In general, relationships between parents and teachers are friendly in the school, and representatives of both parents and teachers have demonstrated interest in performing this international project.

The school has a relationship with Oviedo University because some teachers collaborate with university researchers in a research project on infant education. Our study has brought to the school and the university a new opportunity for cooperation.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

QUESTIONS

Taking into account that it is uncommon in Spanish public schools to have parents, teachers, students and university researchers working together in teams to improve parent-teacher collaboration, the *first* research questions I asked myself as the person responsible for developing the project were the following:

- Is it possible to find a public school where administrators, teachers, and parents are interested in developing the project?
- Is it possible to build the research team? Can we have an equal number of representatives of parents and teachers on the team? What about having students on the team?
- For how long we will be able to perform the project? Will parents, teachers, students and I be interested enough to cope with the many problems that can arise?

Fortunately, I had positive answers to these questions. Once the school was chosen and the team built, the new research questions were:

1. *Is parent-teacher partnership a main characteristic of the school?*

   - Which parent-teacher partnership activities are already being performed at school that may indicate the state of parent-teacher collaboration? Are they enough?
   - Do these activities really promote cooperation, or are they just brief moments of contact?
   - Which kind of relationship do they facilitate: hierarchical (one way) or truly cooperative?
   - Which kind of relationships do these activities allow: academic or personal? Which of these orientations is performed more often at the school?

2. *Is it feasible to establish a permanent seminar at the school with parents, teachers and students, coordinated by a university researcher, to exchange ideas about cooperation and to promote activities to improve it?*

   - Has any similar project been performed in the school before?
   - Are parents, teachers and students interested in meeting together to exchange information about cooperation?
   - Are there possibilities for communication at school?
   - Who, and how many people are willing to participate in the seminar? How often would they like to meet?
   - Could they build a research team able to analyze the school's cooperation needs and to promote activities to improve it?

3. *What are the school's cooperation needs, as they are perceived by parents, teachers and students?*

   - Do parents, teachers and students look for cooperation?
   - What are the demands of the parents? The teachers? The students?
   - Are there strong differences between the demands of each group? What about similarities?

4. *What kinds of activities can be performed at the school to answer parents', teachers' and students' demands?*

   - Can any demand be fulfilled?
   - Is the whole school staff interested in performing any activity?
   - Do these activities promote real cooperation?
   - Is it possible to reach out to more parents than usual through performing these activities?
   - Would parents with special background needs (ethnicity, poverty, family problems) take part in these activities? Would they benefit from them?

OBJECTIVES

Finally, from these questions specific research objectives emerged:

1. To build a permanent research seminar with parents, teachers, students and I as the university coordinator, to exchange ideas about parent-teacher partnership and education;
2. To assess the school's cooperation needs as they are perceived by parents, teachers and students;
3. To organize activities to respond to these demands, from which most parents, teachers and students could benefit. These activities should be mechanisms for increasing communication between parents and teachers and for helping parents and students feel they are important components of the school. This idea should apply especially to those parents and students who have low self-esteem.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study follows a cooperative action research methodology. It is framed in an environment where changes are needed (the school) and performed by those who are directly involved in the school (teachers, parents and students) in cooperation with a university researcher.

Action research methodology has been found by several researchers to be an effective tool for implementing and evaluating community intervention programmes (Ander-Egg, 1987; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Through this method, research generates practical knowledge about the situation analyzed, and in turn, this knowledge allows the participants to establish changes and to promote improvements. The ultimate goal of action research is to improve the situation (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Martínez González, 1992). Kemmis (1988), one of the most representative researchers of this methodology, has delineated three of its main characteristics: it is democratic, participative, and contributes simultaneously to the development of social science and to promoting social change.

The processes involved in this methodology are performed by teams in a participative and democratic way. These teams are composed of people who are directly involved in the situation which is analyzed; sometimes, these teams receive the assistance of expert researchers who initially are not part of the situation but who become involved in it to facilitate the action research.

In this study we built a working team of people directly involved in the school -- parents, teachers and students, assisted by a university facilitator. The team has analyzed and promoted parent-teacher partnership in school to increase knowledge about the processes involved in building cooperation and to improve the quality of the school and children's education.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To reach the objectives, the research was organized according to the following design:

Introduction of the project to Parents and Teachers

At the very beginning of the experience, the facilitator held two or three sessions to explain the structure and goals of the project to the School Parents' Association and to the school staff. This introduction aimed to communicate the value of the project and its benefits. Parents and staff then decided to participate.

Building the action research team

Representatives of parents and teachers were selected by their counterparts to take part in the action research team. They were chosen because of their communication skills and experience in organizing parent-teacher collaboration activities. Through this process, three parents, three teachers and I, as university coordinator, made up the action research team. Two of the three teachers were male, two of the three parents were females, and the university coordinator is also female. The ages of these members range from thirty-two to fifty.

Students took part in the group once it was running with parents, teachers and the university coordinator. Two students from the upper grade, one female and one male of thirteen years of age, became part of the group. Children's participation has been very useful for stimulating the initial action research team integrated by adults. They showed interest in the project and wanted to create a more collaborative partnership between parents and teachers. They believed that students, in general, want their parents to come to the school to interact with teachers, because they like their parents to be active in their learning process; through their participation, parents may better help them solve some of their academic problems.

The team agreed that members would meet once a week, every Wednesday, for an hour and a half at the end of the school day: from 5.00 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. Each session would be summarized in a written report to be used as an evaluation and recording tool of the progress of the project.

Data collection

In addition to the *written reports about project sessions*, team members were encouraged to write their personal impressions, feelings and thoughts about what we were doing in *diaries;* the information gathered would allow us to validate strategies and findings. However, no one except the university coordinator wrote in a diary. Parents and teachers indicated that they had neither the habit nor the time to do so.

Discussions in the team, as well as questionnaires, have been the main sources of information. Discussions have concentrated on issues related to activities organized to reach the proposed objectives:

1. Learning about action research methodology
2. Analyzing current parent-teacher collaboration activities at the school
3. Adapting questionnaires to the culture of the school
4. Analyzing results and needs from the questionnaires
5. Organizing and performing programmes to answer the needs detected
6. Evaluating the success of the programmes and the project
7. Undertaking learnings from the study

Questionnaires were given to parents, teachers and students to gather information about specific collaborative issues. They were developed by S. Christenson, S.F. Lam and M. Sinclair, from the *Partnership for School Success Program,* at the University of Minnesota, and were translated into Spanish by Dr. Raquel-Amaya Martínez González, the university coordinator of this study. The team then adapted them to the cultural characteristics of the school.

The issues analyzed in each questionnaire are the following: for teachers, communication between parents and teachers and teachers' perceptions of parents' educative activities towards their children; and teachers' perceptions of parents' and teachers' involvement in extracurricular activities; for parents, communication between parents and teachers; teachers' competence perceived by parents; parents' involvement in school; and quality of the school as perceived by parents; for the children, perceptions of parents' and teachers' behavior.

Other documents reviewed included: 1.The school annual plans and reports for 1992-93 and 1993-94 academic years; the Report on School Organization; the school curriculum project for 1993-94 academic year; the Children's Report on activities performed at school from 1984-1993; and "AHORA O NUNCA" ("NOW OR NEVER"), the School Parents' Association Report for 1992-93 academic year.

Documents 1, 2 and 3 provide information about the general educative objectives of the school, its organization chart, the staff, the current projects, and the general and specific curriculum plans according to subjects and grades.

The *Children's Report* contains information about the origins of the school and the activities performed during its ten years of work. Data have been gathered through both children's self-reports and interviews of the school staff conducted by the children. According to these procedures, the report includes interpretative information which allows us to analyze predominant values and attitudes in the school.

The School Parents' Association Report is a product of this action reseach project. Its aim is to disseminate information among parents and the school staff about the activities performed in the school every academic year. Through it, parents and teachers can learn about a diversity of activities carried out in different grades at the school, which might have remained unknown if this report had not been written.

4. THE INTERVENTION AND ITS DOCUMENTATION

THE PROJECT PLAN

This two year study had two main phases: cooperative needs assessment and intervention. These spanned the two years of work. The school cooperation needs were assessed during the first year (1992-93 academic year), while the second year (1993-94) was devoted to organizing and performing activities to answer the needs detected.

WORK PERFORMED DURING THE 1992-93 ACADEMIC YEAR

After building the team, the first meetings concentrated on determining the objectives of the project, which have been described before. Then, the team carried out the following activities:

Learning about action research

The team first spent time reading and learning about the action research methodology. We read selected pages of a chapter of Kemmis and McTaggart's book *How to Plan Action Research*. As university coordinator, I advised the team to read this chapter because I thought it was easy and enjoyable and because it would stimulate parents and teachers on the team to read more about this subject later. Nevertheless, they found it long and difficult to understand. It took them more time to read it than they had expected and made them feel they were wasting time better spent doing other things at home. Some members felt anxious and tense because they wanted to read it but could not find time to do so. As coordinator of the group, I learned that because of time, motivation, and fear of not understanding, sometimes it is hard for parents and teachers to read extra papers at home. This applies especially to specialized reports, even when one thinks they are written in a language accessible to everyone. Through this activity I realized that it is not always a good idea to ask parents and teachers to read extra papers at home.

Another fact which comes from this experience is the awareness of the gap that exists between primary school teachers and university researchers in some areas of knowledge, especially in areas related to research methodology. As university researcher, I knew this gap was there, but I had not realized its magnitude before.

How did we resolve the problem of learning about action research? I explained more to the parents and teachers on the team in subsequent meetings, and then a colleague who specializes in action research methodology came from the university to the school to participate in one of our meetings. We performed a participatory session in which every one said what she/he knew about action research. This system allowed my colleague and I to assess the knowledge that parents and teachers had about the subject and to introduce new ideas. The procedure worked well. After this discussion, we wrote the most important ideas about action reseach on paper and posted them on the wall so that we could easily see and remember what action research consists of and how we should perform the project.

Analyzing current parent-teacher collaboration activities

To analyze the school's current parent-teacher collaboration activities was another aim of the group for this first year. It was important to describe and to write them because it helped parents and teachers on the team to realize the activities already performed at the school. They recognized that, although they were actually doing some parent-teacher collaboration activities, these activities often remained unknown or unconscious because they had not thought much about their meaning and because they had not written about them. Lack of time, busy agendas, a lack of habit, and a lack of awareness of the positive effects of doing so are the main reasons parents and teachers in the team cited for not having written about these activities before.

Gathering information about current parent-teacher collaboration activities helped them to realize they were actually doing more than they had expected. This activity also helped them to feel motivated to continue. We learned that writing about the activities one performs helps to highlight the many things one is doing, which has a motivational effect because it increases self-esteem and makes one feel confident about what one is able to do. On the other hand, it allows one to think about how the current activities can be improved and what other activities may be performed.

Among the collaboration activities parents and teachers were already doing at school are the following:

a) teacher interviews of parents to gather information about the child and the family (this information is useful to teachers for organizing counselling activities or academic tasks to help the child to improve his/her learning process);

b) swimming activities for children, in which parents and teachers cooperate and through which they can build a more informal relationship;

c) parties in the school in which the work is shared by parents and teachers;

d) excursions, organized again by both of them;

e) one activity inside preschool classrooms: parents come into the classroom to tell children about their jobs (this activity is interesting because parents become a part of the classroom);

f) parents also collaborate in taking care of school materials and in organizing and performing some workshops whose products are sold;

g) parents participate in the School Council as active members who have something to say in the school's decision-making process (the school council is mandated by law).

The collaborative activities described above can be classified in categories 2, 3, and 5 of the Center on Families' six-part typology: school-home communication, family help in school, and involvement in governance, decision-making and advocacy.

After this analysis, we realized that parents and teachers have a good relationship in this school -- a good point for starting a project which aims to improve and increase collaboration.

Adapting IRE's questionnaires to the culture of the school for needs assessment

Another aim of this initial stage was to evaluate parents' involvement at school through analyzing teachers', parents', and students' behaviors, attitudes, perceptions and expectations about the subject. In order to do so, questionnaires provided by the Institute for Responsive Education in Boston were translated into Spanish and submitted to the team to be adapted to the social and cultural realities of the school.

This was the longest activity performed during the 1992-93 academic year. It required many sessions, and therefore many weeks, but, in the process, many interesting discussions emerged. The questions created an opportunity for parents and teachers to discuss common issues and concerns and a forum to let them know how everyone thinks and feels about these issues. As university coordinator coming from outside the school, I can say that it has been very exciting to see how parents and teachers communicate to each other their different points of view about the same worries in a friendly way. It is important to emphasize that the relationships between parents and teachers were tense.

The initial action research team of parents, teachers and the university coordinator was opened to students when the group adapted the students' questionnaire. The involvement of two students was valuable for the team and encouraged other students to ask their parents to answer the parents' questionnaire.

Once the questions of the three questionnaires were discussed and adapted, the questionnaires were given to all parents whose children attend the school (608), all teachers (40), and students in grades 6, 7 and 8 (356). Results and needs detected from the analysis of the data gathered are described later in this report.

ACTIVITIES PERFORMED DURING THE 1993-94 ACADEMIC YEAR

The 1993-94 academic year was characterized by the organization and performance of programs to answer parents' demands from the previous year. Accordingly, the school has extended its initial categories of the Center on Families' typology to include one more: school help for families (category 1).

Three frequent demands emerged: parents wanted to learn effective ways (1) to improve their relationship with their children, and (2) to help them to develop thinking and studying skills. On the other hand, (3) those parents who have children in grades 6 to 8 wanted to meet with every teacher who teaches their children and not just with their tutor. The second demand was also cited by teachers. Teachers stated:

- *"Parents should ask their children's teachers about studying skills in order to be able to help their children at home; or maybe they can attend conferences or read books about the subject. Then, they should make their children put the skills into practice and supervise them."*
- *"Parents should help their children develop a habit of studying."*

Not all three demands have been answered, however, in this second year of work. We concentrated on needs (1) and (2). We also intended to organize activities for parents to meet every teacher who teaches their children, but teachers on the team indicated that problems in the relationships between teachers could emerge in doing so, since, perhaps, not everyone would agree to meet with their students' parents, as the meetings are not compulsory. We decided, then, to work on this demand later.

From the discussion of this issue I learned that an implicit relationship between teachers may make work difficult in certain areas which, however, are perceived as priorities by parents.

We successfully addressed the other two demands. Two programs were organized and performed: one to let parents know how to improve their relationship with their children, and the second to inform parents and students about study skills.

The programme to let parents know how to improve their relationships with their children

The Systematic Training for Effective Parents programme (STEP), by Don Dinkmeyer and Gary D. McKay, was discussed by the team as a possible tool to inform parents about strategies to improve parent-child interaction. Its contents cover the meaning of misbehavior, listening to children, communication, making decisions, and building self-esteem.

No one on the team had experience in running the program, so we invited Dr. Juana María Maganto, a colleague from the Universidad del País Vasco, to come to the school to explain the program's characteristics and value to the members of the action research team. She came in October of 1993. From the information she gave, parents and teachers in the team considered the program of great value for parents; the team accepted the programme and agreed that I should coordinate it because I had specific knowledge for doing so.

The team also thought that not just parents, but also teachers who are parents should participate in the experience so that parents and teachers could learn the same strategies together and then put them into practice with children.

A letter to parents of children between eight and eleven years of age invited them to take part in the programme. We had expected many parents to be interested, but only eleven parents and one teacher answered positively. Although the active and participatory methodology of the program does not allow more than fifteen parents to learn at a time, we had planned to run the programme twice if many parents were interested.

From the team members' point of view, the lack of responses was not because of lack of interest on the part of the parents, but to a poor method of informing them about it. We should have organized an informal meeting, face to face, to let them know what the program is about and how it would benefit them. This lesson is another outcome of our experience.

The program took ten weeks: from October to December 1993. There were ten participant sessions of two hours each. As I discuss later in this report, parents enjoyed and benefitted from the activity very much.

The programme to inform parents and students about study skills

We started to organize this programme while STEP was being performed, so that it could follow STEP without much time passing between the projects.

The programme covers reading, organizing study time, practicing underlining, writing summaries and schemes, taking notes, and developing memory and the skills for self-control in exams. These topics were developed by teachers with students in grades 6 to 8 and, at the same time, those children's parents were informed about the same contents by a team of parent leaders.

The objective was to inform parents about the study skills teachers usually try to encourage students to develop so that parents can advise their children better about these issues at home. Children can then observe continuity between school and home and perceive that their parents are interested in their studies.

As university coordinator, I advised teachers and parents about the material and the procedures. Over several weeks I trained parents to lead groups of other parents.

Parents of children in grades 6 to 8 were invited by letter to attend a meeting at the school to be informed about the program. All parent leaders and teachers who would be involved and the principal and university facilitator attended. Many parents attended the meeting, and, on this occasion, a larger number of parents than had enrolled in STEP showed interest in participating. A direct and personal way of introducing the program had good results. Seven weekly sessions of two hours each were held during the winter and spring of 1994, each week from February to April, 1994. Teachers conducted the same program with students at about the same time.

Six mothers conducted three groups of fifty parents, whose children were in different grades. After each of the seven sessions, I met with these six mothers to evaluate their performance and to answer any questions they might have so that they could improve their performance the next time. Parent leaders, teachers and I also met together once while running the program to conduct an ongoing evaluation of the entire performance.

Once the program was over, the parents who participated were invited to take part in a discussion to evaluate it and to answer a questionnaire. Data gathered and suggestions made by parents to improve the program are discussed in the following section.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND OUTCOMES

In this section I present data analysis and outcomes separately. Data analysis includes information gathered during the first year of work through discussions in the action research team and the questionnaires described. From this analysis, cooperation needs were assessed and indicated. In the Outcomes section, I describe benefits gained especially by parents and children, changes in parents' and teachers' attitudes toward cooperation, and some limitations.

DATA ANALYSIS

Discussions in the action research team

One of the most profitable activities performed by the action research team during the first year was to discuss every question of the parents', teachers' and students' questionnaires in order to adapt them to the culture of the school. Through this analysis, parents, teachers and students in the team expressed their perspectives on the same subjects, and many interesting needs were highlighted, including the following:

1. *Parents usually come to school to meet formally with teachers, and, most of the time, these meetings pertain to children's academic achievement problems. These meetings mean there is some kind of cooperation at school, but, in order to increase cooperation, informal meetings should also occur. Through both types of interaction, parents and teachers could get to know each other in a more personal way. Nevertheless, it is not easy to find "reasons" to help parents and teachers to meet informally.*

2. *There are not many contacts between parents and teachers to talk about positive aspects of the children's work. These positive points may emerge in the course of a conversation, but they are not the central focus. Teachers informing parents about*

these positive matters would be beneficial because it would make the conversation enjoyable and stimulate parents to contact teachers more often.

3. *Parents do not agree completely with the practice of spending most of the school day teaching a great amount of content to children. Children also need to talk with each other and with their teachers, so it would be useful to devote some class time to doing so. Teachers in the team understand the parents' concern, but, at the same time, they say they need to spend most of the school day teaching because the amount of information children must learn is extensive. If they do not teach all that time, children will pass to the next grade with a lack of information, causing them to fail. Parents still argue that* "It is useful to spend some time listening and talking to children and not just teaching, because it is an investment for the future." *The best thing to do, according to parents, is to teach children to learn to think.*

4. *Most parents do not know the inside of the school: the classrooms, the materials and resources their children use to learn. It would, therefore, be useful to organize an "Open doors day" at school, in which parents could visit the school, talk informally with teachers, and see the resources children use to learn and the outcomes they produce from learning.* This activity was performed at the end of the two school academic years during our project. Its success is discussed in the following section.

5. *That there is a general lack of communication between family members. Many times this is due to television, which especially affects children. They spend many hours watching television and parents do not always know what to do to reduce those hours. Moreover, parents often have problems interacting and communicating with their children and especially with teenagers.* The discussion of this need inspired the proposal to perform the STEP programme to let parents know how to improve their relationships with their children.

6. *The school needs a permanent counsellor. The time the itinerant psychologist from the outside multiprofessional team spends in the school is not enough to perform the variety of activities the school needs to answer its many demands. Nevertheless, we can do nothing to modify this situation, as the education law does not consider counsellors full day staff in public primary schools.*

Analyzing results and needs from the questionnaires

Fifty percent of the parents (304 families) and 50% of the teachers (20 teachers) who were asked to fill out their questionnaire did so. Three hundred and fifty six children from grades 6 to 8 answered their questionnaires as well.

Frequencies and percentages for every quantitative answer of parents', teachers' and students' questionnaires have been obtained through SPSS statistic programs. Qualitative information has been gathered through the open-ended questions on the questionnaires.

In order to save space, and because it is a more worthwhile analysis, I am going to present a comparison of parents' and teachers' answers to several questions included in their respective questionnaires instead of presenting them separately. This comparison is possible because the questions are the same for both.

5.1.2.1. Comparison of parents' and teachers' perceptions of family-school partnership

Among the variables studied for parents and teachers are the following: 1. opportunities to communicate; 2. opportunities to talk about objectives; 3. opportunities to make decisions together; 4. contacts regarding problems; 5. contacts regarding positive issues; and 6. making plans together to solve problems.

Comparative results from the analysis of these variables lead to the following conclusions:

1. Both parents and teachers perceive that there are "frequent" *opportunities to communicate in school*, but the percentage of teachers who perceive this situation is higher than that of the parents (85%, 79% respectively.

2. More teachers than parents think they come together "frequently" to *discuss educational objectives, to make decisions, and to make plans to solve problems*. In all of these cases, teachers tend to feel that they are providing parents with enough opportunities to talk and to solve problems together. Some teachers insist that parents should come to school more often to meet with them:

- *"Parents should come to talk with me about their points of view in order to look together for common solutions to problems, because I am their child's tutor."*

- *"When parents think teachers make mistakes, they should contact them to talk about that, and they should never criticize them in front of the children."*

- *"They should value the work their children perform at school, listen to them and be interested in their problems. They should come to the school to talk with the teacher about any doubts they may have."*

However, parents do not have the same perceptions as teachers about the opportunities they have to meet. This is the case of those who wrote in their questionnaires:

- *"I wish there were more meetings between parents and teachers to talk about children's school achievement and their progress."*

- *"There should be more communication and cooperation between parents and teachers."*

- *"There should be compulsory meetings with parents once a week or, at least, once every two weeks. If we do not ask teachers to meet with them we do not see them. Parents are the ones who always ask to meet."*

- *"I wish there were more communication between parents and teachers, more involvement of parents and students in the design of the school activities. This would lead parents and students to develop more responsibility and more understanding of the teaching activities. It would help students to understand what they are doing in school."*

Consequently, and according to percentages from the questionnaires, teachers perceive their behavior in these issues better than parents do; parents would like to have these meetings more often.

3. Ninety percent of the teachers are "frequently" *in contact with parents when problems arise*; however, just 57% of the parents do the same; others (31.5%) do so only "sometimes." According to figures and comments, teachers think it is necessary to inform parents about their children's problems: *"Parents should meet periodically with teachers to talk about their children's academic development and about any problem children may have."*

Although some parents feel that teachers contact them to talk about problems -- *"They always inform parents when children have problems"* -- others feel they are the ones who contact teachers to talk about problems: *"Teachers should contact parents more often when there is a problem. I am the one who always contacts them when I observe something is wrong with my child, because I want to know whether they have the same perception."*

But there is still a certain number of parents who prefer not to talk about this matter; perhaps they do not feel confident enough to do so in front of the teachers.

4. Both parents and teachers think it is very important to emphasize children's positive behaviors and values to stimulate them to learn. Some of them wrote:

    - *"Children feel stimulated when we say to them they are doing their work very well." (teacher)*
    - *"Parents should value and emphasize their children's positive attitudes and behaviors, not remember only the negative ones." (teacher)*
    - *"I compensate my child for her effort." (parent)*
    - *"I try to help my child to recognize his limitations and positive values; that there are things which he can perform very well and some others in which he may fail." (parent)*

Although both encourage children, it seems they do so individually, because both of them feel they do not meet often to discuss children's positive issues: 39% of the parents said they have "never" discussed issues like that with teachers; however, teachers tended to be more positive: 35% and 30% said they did so "frequently" or "sometimes."

5. Teachers, in general, feel they are in contact with parents more often than parents feel they are in contact with teachers. Teachers may tend to justify their behaviour in this matter, as they think they are giving many opportunities to parents to discuss common issues and concerns about children's education. Parents think these opportunities are less frequent; in fact, although most of them (about 90%) recognize they meet "frequently" or "sometimes" with teachers to discuss problems, they believe they do not meet as often to talk about other necessary matters, including educational objectives, making decisions or making plans to solve problems.

Both parents' and teachers' needs are generally related to the low frequency with which they meet to discuss specific matters:

1. They need to talk more about their respective educational objectives for the children in order to coordinate them.
2. They need to meet more often to plan answers to the students' problems.
3. They should meet more often to talk about children's positive behaviors, and not just about negative ones.

Besides these needs, which come from the *quantitative* analysis of the questionnaires, others emerged from teachers' written responses:

- *"Parents should care about what children do, their problems, studies. Parents should show interest in their children, be in contact with them."*
- *"It is important that parents are interested in the activities children perform at school every day and encourage them to do their homework."*
- *"Parents must encourage their children and be aware of their behavior and school achievement. It is important for parents to let their children know what their responsibilities are and take care children are responsible for them; not to give children something for nothing."*
- *"Parents should follow at home the agreements they discuss with teachers about children. When parents do not care about putting the agreements into practice, children do not improve their behaviors, attitudes and school achievement."*

Parents, on the other hand, demanded:

- *"It is necessary to reduce the number of children in the classrooms and to insure that teachers continue their training in order to know the new teaching methodologies."*
- *"Teachers should take into account individual differences between children."*
- *"I would like teachers to know my children better and to encourage them to study."*
- *"Some teachers should recognize that they also make mistakes. I would like them to help children as if they were their own."*

Despite the needs described, it can be said that *parents, in general, have a positive attitude towards teachers and the school.* This statement comes from the following comments:

- *"Teachers encourage my child to be interested in studying. They give me advice about how to help my child, as he has some speech problems."*

- *"I would like teachers to always be as they are now. They are always willing to talk with parents about anything."*
- *"They are very responsible for their work."*
- *"I am grateful to teachers for being in contact with parents."*
- *"They are loving with children."*
- *"The school has a high standard."*
- *"The school has good quality teaching."*
- *"I just want to say thanks to teachers."*

Once the data from the parents' questionnaires was analyzed, we organized a meeting for parents in order to discuss the results and to ask them about other needs. In this meeting, all members of the action research team were present. Parents reported that they would like to learn ways to improve their relationships with their children and to help them to develop thinking and studying skills. In addition, those who have children in grades 6 to 8 would like to meet with every teacher who teaches their children and not just with their tutor, as is usual practice in primary schools, because they would like to have closer relationships with teachers.

The students' point of view

Issues analyzed in the children's questionnaire related to their perception of parents' and teachers' behavior.

Children think that both parents and teachers are interested in their academic success and help them when problems arise. Fifty-five per cent of the children perceive that their parents are "always" or "often" interested in their progress at school; some voiced this perception as follows:

- *"When I cannot do something they encourage me, they help me."*
- *"They help me with homework, they ask me the lessons, and make everything easier to me."*
- *"They encourage me, they help me, and make me feel stronger."*

- *"My parents remind me I must study; they answer my questions and tell me I should study little by little those things which are more difficult to understand."*

- *"They pay a private teacher for me."*

- *"They buy my books and help me to organize my homework; they also encourage me when I get low marks."*

Many of them see their teachers as follows:

- *"They explain the lessons, and when you ask them something you have not understood, they explain it again and again. It does not matter if they have to repeat it ten times for you. They ask you to do homework every day to practice."*

- *"I had to repeat this year and they have helped me to feel O.K. among my classmates, who are younger than me. They try to make studying easy for me."*

- *"They spend time when lessons are finished to explain to us things we did not understand."*

However, many children think teachers do not care much about their personal lives and circumstances: 42% feel that just "some" teachers care about that, and 33% feel "none" of them does. Also, more than 50% believe their parents meet with their teachers "sometimes" or "never" during an academic year.

OUTCOMES

In this section I describe outcomes from the several activities performed during the two years of work.

Process evaluation of the action research team

A self-evaluation of the activity performed by the action research team was made after the first three months of work. It was very interesting because it allowed members of the group to voice their views about what we had been doing, the feasibility of the project, and how they felt in the group. Some ideas offered by members of the group are described below:

ACHIEVEMENTS

1. *We have made it possible for parents, teachers, students and a university researcher to meet to exchange concerns and suggestions about education and cooperation.*

2. *There is a nice atmosphere in the group; every one is on close terms with each other.*

3. *We have been able to meet systematically once a week, which has made it possible to continue the experience after three months of work.*

4. *We have realized the school is performing more cooperation activities between parents and teachers than we had thought. At the same time, we are aware now that there are more cooperation needs than we had thought before.*

5. *There are many teachers in the school who are willing to cooperate in the activities the team may suggest to answer these needs.*

6. *The team provides an opportunity to discuss many interesting issues which would never have been discussed at school if this study had not been performed.*

7. *Although there are parents, teachers, students and a university researcher in the group, we do not perceive differences of roles among each other; we are a team, and we feel good about that relationship.*

8. *It is an achievement that a university researcher is working in a primary school with parents, teachers and students, and on the same level as they, to increase the school's quality of education.*

LIMITATIONS

1. *At first, some parents and teachers did not trust the project because cooperation is very hard to achieve. Others did not understand it very well.*

2. *It is hard to work at this time of day (from 5:00 pm to 6:30 pm); we feel tired after working all day.*

3. *Sometimes we feel frustrated because we would like to go faster to achieve more.*

4. *We suspect that the activities the team performs remain unknown to other parents and teachers.*

5. *We do not have much time to perform the project (just one hour and a half per week).*

The "Open Doors Day" at school

This activity, a product of the project, had not been performed before at the school. It has had a motivational effect on parents, teachers and students, because it represents a change from the school's every day activities, and more important, because parents, teachers and students felt acknowledged by each other.

Teachers were motivated by the parents' recognition of their activity and work. Parents, at the same time, felt like important components of the school, as they were invited to visit and to interact with teachers. Children, on the other hand, were excited about having their parents in the school watching the many things they had done during the academic year.

This activity has seemed to increase parents', teachers', and students' self-esteem and developed positive attitudes between the groups, which makes cooperation easier. The whole school benefitted from the experience.

The programme to let parents know how to improve their relationships with their children

The twelve parents who participated in the STEP Program agreed they had learned very much from it ("The content has been very, very interesting and very instructive;" *"I have discovered a new and more satisfactory way to interact with my children; the programme has also helped me to realize some things which are wrong that I thought were right"*), and could soon improve their relationships with their children (*"I am seeing that the strategies we are learning work"*). Also, they made some new demands: the program should benefit more parents, it should be performed again, every year, and another program should be conducted for parents of teenagers.

It has been a great experience for me, as facilitator of the program, to see how motivated parents were to learn about parent-child relationships. At first, they were skeptical about how much they could learn from the programme, but soon they became more and more involved and enthusiastic. Parents appreciate receiving any kind of information about parenting because they feel unsure about how well they are educating their children. Moreover, sharing experiences and feelings with other parents allows them to learn from each other and prevents them from feeling isolated in their own parenting experiences.

One limitation we found is that only a few parents can benefit from it at the same time. Since active parent participation and discussion are expected, the program is suitable for no more than fifteen parents at a time. Moreover, the program takes ten weeks, which makes it difficult to find time to develop it more than once in a academic year.

Due to the demands made by the parents who took part in it and others who have learned about it from them, I expect to help the school run it again next academic year.

The programme to inform parents and students about studying skills

The mothers who conducted the three groups of parents learned from this experience, and their self-confidence in conducting groups increased. It is important that we perform more programmes like this one at the school, because these mothers are more willing than before to develop activities with groups of parents. I am very proud of them and would like to thank them for the opportunity they gave me to learn and enjoy.

The parents who took part were invited to attend a discussion meeting to evaluate the programme and to answer a questionnaire. All of them, without exception, spoke about its usefulness (*"It has been very interesting and useful"*; *"the contents are very interesting, but it is necessary that children put them into practice"*; *"I feel more informed about studying skills now than before"*), and asked about developing it again the next academic year; moreover, they suggested it should be extended to those children of ten years of age and their parents. Teachers also agreed with these requests. *Among parents' objections were*: 1) the program should last more than seven sessions in order to have more time to discuss and to share experiences (*"It has been very short; time has gone very quickly because, in addition to talking about what studying skills are, we discussed our particular cases to share experiences and to compare one with another"*); 2) some parents are not sure about whether they will be able to put their learnings into practice at home to effectively help their children, because of the poor relationship they have with them (*"I have now more information to help my child with their studies, but he does not accept my help"*). These comments indicate the need for activities to improve parent-child relationships first, as a positive basis for other parent education programs.

6. POLICY INFLUENCES AND RESULTS: OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED AFTER TWO YEARS OF WORK

We achieved our first objective of building a permanent research seminar at the school with representatives of parents, teachers, students and a university coordinator, to exchange ideas about parent-teacher partnership, to assess needs in this field, and to organize activities to increase collaboration. We built an action research team, which included representatives of each group; moreover, the team seems permanent, because its members have met once a week, every week, during the two academic years the project has lasted.

The school had never before had a permanent *team* such as this one to promote cooperation between parents and teachers. This innovation indicates that the subject of the project is of interest to the entire school. The awareness of this interest on the part of the whole school community and the creation of the research team have been the first influences the project has had on the school.

A second specific objective of the project was also achieved: to assess the school's cooperation needs as they are perceived by parents, teachers and students. The project has also influenced the school through the activities performed to achieve this objective. First, analyzing current parent-teacher collaboration activities helped members of the action research team to realize that before the project started, there were more collaboration activities than they had thought; this realization helped them to compensate for the feelings of frustration that emerged every now and then and to feel motivated to go on. This motivation contributed to consolidating the team and was essential for keeping the group working.

On the other hand, the needs assessed through discussions in the team and questionnaires indicated that those previous activities had to be complemented with others, which, again, stimulated the team to follow through. Thanks to this project, the school now has a very active group of people interested in increasing and improving cooperation and a greater variety of activities which the school offers to its community. The school seems to be energized to improve its quality of education.

From the team's perspective, we only partially achieved the third specific objective. We have organized activities to answer the demands detected through the needs assessment, from which parents, teachers and students should benefit. However, parents whose children have behavior problems or very low academic achievement, in general, appear to be very hard to reach, and we could not convince most of them to become involved in the activities. It is clear that it is not enough to invite them to participate through a letter. Unfortunately, phone calls and home visits from other parents or teachers were not accepted as a feasible plan by the parents and teachers on the action research team. Phone calls insisting parents come to school are made in public schools for emergency cases, and pertain to meeting teachers, tutors, or the principal, but are not used to encourage participation in programs assumed to be voluntary. Home visits, on the other hand, have never been conducted by parents or teachers in this school and are also uncommon in this country.

Nevertheless, the project's efforts to achieve this third objective have made worthwhile contributions to the school. A more positive attitude between parents and teachers can now be observed in the school. Many parents now understand that teachers and other parents are willing to help them because they have sponsored programs to answer parents' requests. At the same time, teachers have realized that parents really appreciate their help and now report feeling more motivated to organize activities for them.

Some parents have learned to conduct training for other parents and feel proud of that achievement, especially because they never believed they would be able to do so. Also, through taking part in the program, more parents are interested in becoming involved in future activities the school might organize -- not just to learn through participating in them, but also to contribute to their organization. Their involvement motivated them to organize other activities from which more parents can benefit.

Teachers, on the other hand, are also willing to organize activities to increase communication with families: the activities teachers organized in response to parents' requests demonstrate this willingness. The organization of an "open doors day," in which parents and the whole community are invited to visit the school, was another positive outcome of the project.

The main objectives proposed for the project have been achieved. The best proof of this statement is that parents and teachers in the school want us to continue working in this field. From my point of view, this wish represents a great success. During the following academic year (1994-95), we organized a program to help children increase their self-esteem. To develop this and other activities, the university researcher encouraged parents and teachers to apply for money from the Cultural Foundation of the city and helped them write the necessary proposal. They have already received a positive response. This is an important issue for school policy, because parents have never before applied for such help. Moreover, the positive response has increased parents' and teachers' motivation to keep working in this field, and they are willing to incorporate this approach into school policy in order to obtain money in the future.

However, one weak point of the study is that although parents, teachers, and students have benefitted from performing the project, they are so busy with their many activities that perhaps if the university coordinator had not taken part in the study they would not have met as often to discuss and organize activities. From my perspective, the dependence of the team on the facilitator is a weak point of the project. The work performed and the effects achieved might be diminished if the facilitator were to stop working with the team. This fact causes doubts about the long term effects experiences like this one can have.

Nevertheless, current national education policy emphasizes that school buildings must be progressively open to the communities they serve in order to conduct more educational and development activities, especially for adults; this effort may help to keep parents and teachers working on the activities and processes developed through this project even when the outside facilitator is not there. On the other hand, the decreasing birth rate in Spain has reduced the number of classrooms needed in schools; as a consequence, some teachers will transfer from one school to another, from one city to another, or from urban contexts to rural ones. Of course, many teachers want neither to move nor to lose classrooms in their schools. In a few years schools may have to compete with each other to reach children, and that means that teachers should look for ways to stimulate parents to send their children to their schools. Perhaps at that time parents and teachers will be more willing to attempt by themselves projects grounded in processes similar to the ones we developed for this study.

We do not expect at the present time that this experience will have any influence beyond this school and the community the school serves. We would need to work in the school longer to extend the effects to reach more parents, teachers and students, and to achieve more substantial results in order for other schools' communities to consider this experience worthwhile enough to be implemented in their schools. We cannot forget that parent-teacher partnerships are hard to create and, because of this difficulty, some parents and teachers think the effort they must invest in doing so is worthless because they do not expect positive changes. I noticed these prejudices at the very beginning of this work: parents and teachers in the action research group worried about what everyone might say about each other, and they were also skeptical about what the project might achieve.

Nevertheless, although no other school is implementing the cooperative model described in this project, it is being introduced in academic fields and in-service training programs. As a university professor, I can introduce the model and the study to bachelors' degree students, doctoral students, and educators and psychologists whose work consists of facilitating processes in schools. The model is stimulating interest among these professionals who, however, understand that it is difficult to implement.

7. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was important that at the very beginning of the project, the action reseach team met once a week on the same day and at the same time to establish a habit of meeting. It has also been useful for the university coordinator to meet with parents, teachers and students every week to help them organize activities or to propose matters to be discussed, because they had never met before to discuss topics related to parent-teacher partnerships. The success of the first meetings was a key to the success of the project.

Parents' and teachers' expectations about the project were very high at first, because they saw the project as the tool they had always sought for improving parent-teacher relationships. Although it was important that expectations about the project were positive, they would not necessarily have been high at first, because everyone still had a great deal to learn.

Expectations about the facilitator were also very high. Because the project was introduced by a qualified person who came from outside the school and who worked with them, parents and teachers tended to see me as the person responsible for its success, and they became dependent on me. It was necessary to explain what action research means in order to avoid this view. It was also essential to help parents, teachers and students realize that the success of the project depended especially on them, as they were its real performers.

It was also important that the whole school community (students, parents and teachers) had representatives in the action research group in order to express their different perspectives and values about parent-teacher relationships; these perspectives and values affected the decisions about which kind of activities the group performed. I noticed that parents and teachers frequently showed political interest in the project. They liked it because it had the potential to help them increase children's school achievement, and, in doing so, the school and the Parents' Association might win prestige. Students, on the other hand, liked the project because they wanted to see their parents in the school, close to them and the teachers, involved in activities that might help them to improve students' academic work. Students' interest in the project seemed to be more affective than that of parents and teachers.

During the first year of work the team focused on discussions to analyse the current state of parent-teacher partnership in the school and to assess needs in this area. While doing so, we felt every now and then that our activity was having no effect on the school: parents, teachers and students knew we were working on this matter because the project had been introduced to all of them and because they answered their respective questionnaires, but they did not know anything about the contents of our discussions and conclusions. At first, we had planned to inform them periodically about our progress, but we were unable to do so because of lack of time. This situation made us feel that the group was isolated in the school, which was incongruous with the goal of increasing cooperation. Later, at the end of the academic year, when we had analyzed the answers from the questionnaires and met with all parents and teachers to inform them about the needs detected, we understood that we had been working in the right manner. The isolation had been temporarily necessary in order to do all of the work that we then presented to the school community. We ultimately felt proud of ourselves.

From my perspective, it is important to highlight the team's feeling of isolation because it indicates an apparent lack of infuence of the project on the school during the first year of work. It seemed as if the school community was unaware of the work of the team. Nevertheless, this ignorance was merely apparent, because many members of the community attended the meetings we organized to inform them about the needs detected and to discuss other needs they detected.

From this experience we learned that some time of isolation of the action research team from the school community is needed in the first stage of performance of the project, for the team to be able to consolidate itself as a team, and to develop a deep needs assessment which nobody else would perform at school.

As shown by data from the survey, both parents and teachers in the school need to find more opportunities to discuss common issues and concerns about children's education. However, it is not worthwhile to create these opportunities by making phone calls to ask a particular parent to meet a particular teacher. It was more useful to organize programmes in which parents and teachers participate together to improve children's education. In doing so, they found opportunities to plan the program together, to discuss goals, and to organize means and times. Engaging in a project in which parents and teachers are both interested allows them to combine efforts and to develop positive attitudes toward each other.

In summary, perhaps the most significant lesson has been the realization that, despite the many difficulties encountered in performing the project (lack of time and money, frustrations, fewer people involved than desirable), it is possible for parents, teachers and students to meet often (once a week or more) to talk about children's education and to organize activities to improve it. This project allowed parents and teachers to build closer relationships with each other. Its success has been possible thanks to enthusiasm, perseverance, a belief in our endeavor, and the cohesion of the action research team.

Moreover, it is important to add that not just parents, teachers and students have benefitted from this experience; as university coordinator, I have learned about the real needs parents have, the efforts some teachers make to improve their relationship with parents, and the complexity of answering so many different parents', teachers', and students' demands.

8. COMMENTS

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

As I have described in the previous sections of this report, the project was introduced to the parents by the representatives of the Parents' Association and to the school staff by the university coordinator. All parents and teachers who attended the introductory meetings were invited to participate in the study and to share their ideas. Many parents, teachers, and students did so in different ways and across grade levels, but not all participated. Some played very active roles in the study by taking part in the action research team; they were, basically, key representatives of both the Parents' Association (the President and two more mothers) and the teachers (the Principal, the Studies Organizer, and other teachers). The systematic activity of the team has been crucial for developing the activities I described and for achieving the proposed objectives.

Other parents and teachers collaborated in answering their respective questionnaires. Respondents included 50% of the parents and 50% of the teachers. On the other hand, all tutor teachers of grades 6, 7, and 8 were involved in developing the program to inform students about studying skills; therefore, even when these tutors had not been involved in the action research team, all collaborated to develop the program that the team had organized. Although not all teachers in the school were active in the study during the two years of work, many of them collaborated when the action reseach team asked them to do so, in the activities the team considered necessary for addressing the demands detected through the needs assessment. From this perspective, taking into account the different ways in which teachers have participated in the study, I can say that most of them did show interest.

Because there are so many parents in the school community, we cannot expect to have all of them involved in any particular activity. In this study, representatives of the Parents' Association played an active role, taking part in the action research team and in the organization and performance of the two programs for parents described above. Moreover, 50% of the 608 families who send their children to the school participated by answering the parents' questionnaire, and others attended the meeting to hear the results of the questionnaires and to discuss the needs detected. Others took part in the programmes to improve parent-child relationships and to learn about studying skills. Nevertheless, representatives of the Parents' Association agreed that most of the parents who participated in the programs did not have serious relationship or academic problems with their children, while others who really needed the programs did not participate. These last parents are not necessarily those who have low levels of education or income; they are just parents whose children do not behave well or do not reach the standard academic level. Consequently, we will consider ways to stimulate these "hard to reach" parents to participate in future programs.

Children contributed to the study by taking part in the action research team through their representatives, answering their questionnaires, and participating in the program about studying skills.

ABOUT TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM

Taking into account results of previous studies conducted by different authors and my own experience in the field of parental involvement in school, the degree to which this involvement can be reached depends, to a great extent, on teachers' attitudes. Teachers represent an academic authority not only for the students, but also for their parents. This is especially true when grades are a factor, in the higher levels of primary education and in secondary education.

In contrast, teachers' attitudes toward involvement are conditioned by their education and training in this area, and also by their positive or negative experiences in this field. Most teachers in the Laviada school recognize the great contribution that family-school partnership can make toward increasing the quality of children's education and toward creating a nice atmosphere in the school. But at the same time, some resist involving parents for other reasons: fear of losing control of the school or of the activities they perform in the classroom; lack of ability and training for interacting with parents; negative previous experiences; more work, time and effort needed; negative comparisons between teachers who involve and who do not involve parents; and, generally, a lack of tradition for stimulating involvement in the schools.

This resistance has been sustained in Spain by the centralization of education, which has caused the traditional separation we now observe between the schools and the families and communities they serve. As I described at the beginning of this report, the new education law, LOGSE, which is currently being implemented in Spain, encourages the decentralization of education to a certain extent, in order for every school to feel free to adapt its curriculum to the needs of its community.

In this path of transformation, principals have a key role to play. Their attitudes toward parental involvement are crucial to start and to develop projects in this field. If a principal's attitude is positive, then there is a starting point for the project even if he or she does not participate actively in the activities organized to perform it. But if the attitude is negative, the project cannot even start. The experience has been successful at the Laviada school because the principal liked the idea and wanted to be involved, encouraging other teachers to do the same; however, in another school where parents and teachers wanted to develop the project, it was not even possible to begin because the principal neither accepted it nor even allowed the group to perform any activities for parents or children.

Even when parent-teacher partnerships are developed, not all activities proposed by parents are adopted by teachers. In this study, parents of children in grades 6 to 8 wished to meet with every teacher who teaches their children and not just with their child's tutor. Some teachers were willing to accept the proposal but others were not, so, in an effort to avoid possible negative comparisons among teachers, the group decided not to follow this proposal. Evidently, the school as a system, and not just the attitudes of a group of teachers, conditions the extent to which partnership can be developed and reached. It may be that the higher the educational level of the children, the less likely the school is to perform the proposed activities. Teachers of infant education and of the first levels of primary education are more willing to be involved in partnership experiences than those in the higher levels of primary education.

Several strategies might address the resistance teachers show in this area:

- include specific content about this subject in teacher education curricula, so that teachers can learn the theoretical rationale and benefits of this specific area of education, as well as some useful strategies and abilities to put findings and ideas into practice;
- continue this education through in-service training programs, seminars, and discussions;
- stimulate principals to take an active role in promoting partnership experiences in their schools, similar to the ones described in this and other reports;
- allow teachers who may be interested in this field to develop initiatives in their schools, even when the principal has a negative attitude toward partnership or is not interested in taking an active role;
- promote seminars and discussion groups about partnerships in the schools and in the agencies which support schools, in order to develop discussions among teachers from different schools which allow them to know each other and the initiatives they develop in this area;
- develop research in this field through promoting collaboration between schools, universities and other educative research institutions, in order to gain more sustantial knowledge in this area. From this knowledge improvements could be made in intervention. This multi-nation study might serve as a model for other educational researchers and agencies to follow.

ABOUT COMMON INSTRUMENTS

The common questionnaires for parents, teachers and students were translated into Spanish, but this was not enough to have these instruments ready to be applied to the Laviada school community. We realized that we needed to adapt them to the culture of the school in order to gather appropriate information from this community; in doing so, we also realized that not just parents and teachers should be present in the process of adaptation, but also students because they might have ideas to contribute regarding the issues included in the students' questionnaire. This activity allowed us to have students on the action research team in addition to parents and teachers.

In the process of adapting the questionnaires, representatives of parents, teachers and students on the action research team had the opportunity to discuss how appropriate each question was and to transform them to be more suitable for the reality of the school. This activity gave team members an excellent opportunity to listen to each other, to confront different points of view in a friendly way, to learn about many different ways to approach partnership through the content of the questions, and to feel each point of view recognized when adapting and transforming the questions. In this sense, the questionnaires have been a useful tool for helping parents, teachers and students think about and discuss common issues and concerns and for stimulating them to look for possible answers to partnership needs.

The questionnaires also gave us organized and structured material to start our work. Again, the content included in each question gave us an opportunity to work on specific partnership topics and issues and became a starting point to learn what parent-teacher partnership consists of or what objectives and goals can be looked for in this arena. If we had not had these questionnaires, we would have begun by reading papers to know what information and tools we would need to proceed. These activities would have taken much more time than we spent adapting the questionnaires and, most likely, they would have been less stimulating.

It is necessary to say, though, that this process of adaptation took many weeks and as a result, parents and teachers were anxious for its conclusion in order to be able to implement the questionnaires to learn what other parents and teachers thought about the state of parent-teacher partnerships in the school. They were also very anxious for intervention. In the same way, it seemed they did not care much about needs assessment, as if they already knew what they needed; they wanted to proceed straight through the intervention. As facilitator of the project, I tried to explain to them the usefulness of the questionnaires, not just to gather quantitative information for statistics, but also to give other parents, teachers and students the opportunity to express their needs and ideas; they would help us to collect different perspectives on the subject.

Although at first we intended to apply these instruments twice, before and after the intervention in order to assess its effects, we later decided not to do so for several reasons. First, as this is a two year project, the two applications would have taken place each year, which seemed to be insufficient time to assess the impact of the intervention. Second, it is not common practice to use questionnaires in the school, so we believed it would not be a good idea to give the same questionnaires twice to parents, teachers and students with such a short time intervening; they would probably not answer them. Third, we would not have enough time to analyze the information and to compare it with the data gathered in the first application.

ABOUT SUSTAINING THE PROJECT

Despite the achievements of the project, some weaknesses of this experience must be noted. One is the dependence of the team on the facilitator. The group has achieved a certain level of autonomy; for example, at the beginning of the new academic year (1994-95), parents and teachers organized and performed the program to teach parents and children about studying skills without much help from the facilitator. However, her presence in the school is needed to keep the initiative working and to provide parents and teachers with valuable materials to work on. Also, parent leaders do not feel confident enough to inform other parents about certain areas which are seen as needs for them (relationships with teenagers, self-esteem). This fear is expected, as they have never received formal or informal education about these issues. Teachers, on the other hand, feel more or less the same, and, at the same time, are so busy with their work that if no one from outside had come to the school to stimulate them about reaching partnership, they would have returned to their previous habits and forgotten the activities performed in this area.

Given these conditions, it is difficult to find ways to keep parents, teachers and students working together without the facilitator to improve cooperation. Some ideas related to educational policy can be suggested to improve the situation, but implementation does not seem easy in Spain. One proposal is to keep the facilitator in the school once the project has finished; this would mean renegotiating possibilities, times, methodologies, roles and activities, because the facilitator is not expected to remain in the school forever.

A second solution would be for the Ministry of Education to hire specialized educators who would take the role of facilitator in the schools. This is not an easy solution because of the lack of money to invest in this field, even when family-community-school partnership is an objective of the current education law (LOGSE).

The third possibility is the use of counsellors. Some secondary education schools in Spain have counsellors among their staff whose main responsibility is to help teachers, principals, children, parents and the school as a whole to find suitable answers to their needs. However, counsellors are few, and they have so many curriculum and behavior problems to address for teachers that they can hardly assume responsibilities in the field of partnership. On the other hand, although they have received university degrees in Education, their knowledge about this arena is limited because it is not included in the programs for these degrees. From this perspective, the inclusion of credits related to family-community-school partnership to achieve the university degree is needed, as well as in-service training programs for school counsellors.

A fourth possibility is to support research in this field, so that university researchers and researchers from other institutions could cooperate with schools in a systematic way. Doctoral students could be trained in this arena to promote action research teams in schools and to facilitate the process of developing effective family-community-school partnerships.

ABOUT THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF THE WORK

In this case study parents and teachers on the action research team have been interested in finding ways to help students reach higher school achievement. They are especially worried about those children who can do better at school but do not do so, and they also worry about these students' parents. Both parents and teachers have the perception that those parents who most need to contact the school because of the low quality of behaviour or achievement of their children are the ones who come to school least often, even when they receive special invitations to do so. When this project started, representatives of both parents and teachers hoped to be able to do more for these parents, as well as, of course, for others who might not need as much help.

At the same time, the new education law (LOGSE) which is being implemented in Spain encourages innovation programs in schools as well as initiatives to promote family-community-school partnerships. Teachers saw this project as a way to innovate in the school and to explore new paths to contact those parents whose children need more home support to improve their school achievement; unfortunately, the two years of the study have not been enough to reach most of these parents. On the other hand, we viewed the study as an opportunity for parents to interact more often with teachers, to try new activities with parents, to involve more parents in the school, to reach those parents who might need more help, and to improve children's school achievement and behavior.

Taking these views into account, the project was a way to put into practice and to coordinate two basic goals of the new education law: innovation and the development of family-community-school partnerships. Moreover, the action research methodology through which the study has been performed allowed parents and teachers to feel that they were the real performers of the study and to follow another recommendation of LOGSE -- to develop action research programs in schools.

But the ultimate goal of the work has been to facilitate cooperation in the school and to help both parents and teachers to be aware that cooperation is possible if it is well organized. We have largely achieved these two objectives. In fact, both parents and teachers have proposed that the study should continue after the two years of work, and because of that support we have continued our work.

To conclude, I would like to thank the whole school community at the Laviada school for giving me the opportunity to meet and learn with them and to share such a wonderful experience and Oviedo University (Spain) for the economic help given to support the study.

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Chapter 5

BUILDING SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN THE PROCESS OF SOCIAL TRANSITION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

By Eliška Walterová

> Motto 1: *A crisis of experience from an absolute perspective leads regularly to a crisis of essential human responsibility to the world and for the world. This also means a human responsibility to himself and for himself. And where the responsibility is missing -- as a sensible ground for man to stand on in his environment -- there also the identity as a human place in the world is vanishing inevitably.*
>
> —V. HAVEL

> Motto 2: *The school door has to be open from both sides.*
>
> —JANA MATOUŠOVÁ

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

The Czech Republic has existed since 1st January 1993, when the former Czechoslovakia was officially separated into two independent states. The country is small, with a surface area of 78,862 km, and is located in Central Europe bordering Austria, Germany, Poland, and Slovakia. The population is 10.3 million (the 10th largest in Europe), and the capital city of Prague has 1.2 million inhabitants. The official language is Czech.

Historical context

The present territory was one of the first settlements in Central Europe. Christianity was adopted in the 9th century, and the formation of the Czech state began in the 10th century. Its existence dates from 1212 to 1526. The state reached its highest level during the reign of Charles IV (1346-1378). The oldest university in Central Europe was established in Prague (1348).

During the period from 1526 to 1918, the Czech lands were a part of the Hapsburg monarchy. The defeat of the Czech resistance (1620) confirmed Hapsburg rule and strong antireform leadership. A number of the Czech reformed nobility and educated priests were expelled, among them J.A. Comenius (1593-1671). The antireformation period lasted until 1781. Czech National Enlightenment started around this time and developed steadily during the 19th century. Intensive economic development, building Czech national consciousness, began in 1848.

The history of the Czech Republic remained turbulent during the twentieth century. On October 28,1918, the independent Czechoslovak Republic was proclaimed. During the years of World War II, 1939-1945, the Czech and Slovak regions were separated. In 1945, the Czechoslovak Republic was renewed. Again changing the country's structure, the Communist reversal in 1948 started the socialist period. Numerous leaders and other Czech citizens left the country. Although a short period of the "Prague Spring, 1968" was crudely and violently interrupted by the entry of the armies of the Warsaw Pact, the international, cultural and political isolation and one-way Soviet orientation lasted until 1989.

On November 17,1989, the "velvet revolution" started a period of profound political, economical and social transition. A number of unexpected problems arose. One of them was the deep-rooted Czech and Slovak conflict. The process of growing differentiation culminated in 1991 when the former Czech and Slovak Federal Republic was separated. (For more detailed information see J. Prucha and E. Walterová, 1992.)

Political context

A complex governmental system exists on the national, regional, and local levels. The President is the head of the state, elected by the Czech Parliament. Since 1992, Václav Havel has been the President. The Czech government has executive power, and the Parliament has legislative power. The government, composed of representatives of the political coalition, is chaired by Václav Klaus, a representative of the Civic Democratic Party. Both political pluralism and economic reform based on privatization and a new market orientation have created social turbulence.

The Czech Republic is striving for cooperation with European and other countries. The country is a member of the United Nations and the Council of Europe. The Republic continues to seek ways to work with other international structures, particularly NATO and the European Union.

Historical and cultural background of education

Education has played an important role in Czech history. Historical evidence indicates the existence of church, monastic and parish schools dating back to the 10th century. The establishment of Charles University (1348) influenced the cultural and educational climate, enforcing the secularization of education and developing international contacts. Later, Czech education was affected by the educational policy of the Hapsburg Monarchy. Six year compulsory school attendance was enacted by 1774.

Rapid developments in education continued during the 19th and 20th centuries. Teachers were especially influential during the period of the National Enlightenment. In the second half of the 19th century, women's education developed significantly. The development of technical education was inspired by economic and industrial prosperity in the 19th century.

By the beginning of the 20th century, the process of developing literacy was practically complete. After the First World War, Czechoslovakia assumed between the 10th and 12th rank among highly educationally developed countries. A network of schools was developed. The rapid improvement of higher education was ensured by the creation of ten universities and higher education schools. Unfortunately, during World War II, Czech schools suffered.

After the war, educational development was very hopeful. In 1948, the Act on Comprehensive School was passed as an initial step to a uniform, ideological dependence on school and a centralization of educational policy. Consequently, regressive measures were adopted and the divergence from trends in other developed countries was widened.

The political transition after 1989 influenced educational policy legislation as follows:

- the repeal of Marxist ideology from education
- a new opportunity to establish private and alternative schools
- new measures for the decentralization of the school system
- the support of school autonomy and educational diversity. (See more detail in J. Prucha, 1992.)

These transformations had particular effects for Czech parents. The establishment of private and alternative schools gave them more freedom in choosing schools, greater responsibility for their children's education, and more opportunities to influence school life.

The establishment of parents' associations became a logical vehicle for allowing parents to express demands and for ensuring their rights and responsibilities in their children's education. In addition, the reformed economy based on market principles evoked changes in parents' attitudes toward education and provoked them to be engaged in schooling. Their participation included, then, financial responsibilities in education.

THE POLICY CONTEXT

Policy in educational reform

After 1989 the basic tasks for educational policy were the democratization and humanization of education. Legislative action -- the Act on State Administration of Education and on School Based Management -- afforded an opportunity for change. This Act gave more responsibility to individual schools, principals and teachers. The power of the central authorities was reduced. More appropriate conditions for modification, alternatives and experiments allowed schools and teachers to change situations in schools. Educational reform from the bottom up started in 1990. Unfortunately, education was not a state political priority in the first period of the social transition. Discussion of education reform concentrated mainly on the structure of education and minor curriculum innovations. Increasing economic problems forced policy makers to focus on financial questions and the economic functions of education.

School-family-community partnerships were not considered a focus of educational reform. Fundamental changes in the attitude of the community toward school, in school climate, and in mutual relations between school and parents had not been given appropriate attention. The Parents Union, established in 1991 on the national level, has only a slight influence on education policy. It is a nongovernmental, voluntary organization of parents and other citizens interested in education. The Union's approximately 2000 members continue to discuss children's rights, the transformation of the educational system, and other issues of school governance. Later, after the establishment of the Union, parents received the formal right to choose a school for their children, through the efforts of the Parliamental Commission for Education and Science. Various activities occurred on the local level. Several schools were initiated to experiment with the establishment of school councils as self-governing bodies. One article of the proposal, "A bill on basic and secondary schools," proposed the establishment of school councils as a new step toward a democratic school policy. The school council would ensure community participation in school activities and would provide a balance of interests. The council would consist of elected representatives of parents (and students older than 18 years), the principal and teacher representatives, and important local personalities delegated by the local government. The school council would confirm the school budget and annual school reports as well as school projects and plans and would have the right to initiate the removal of the principal.

Pluralism in education and the diversification of schools helped to activate some groups of parents, mainly in private and alternative schools. However, there were still schools without mutual communication with families or a parents' group. Many parents were waiting for school initiatives. An underdeveloped mechanism of participatory educational policy and a lack of experience were obstacles for the positive development of partnerships. It was extremely important for schools to have examples of good practice and to share their experiences. These conditions created the context in which this case study developed.

Policy in educational research

The reconstruction of education in the Czech Republic had to include a reconstruction of educational research. Prior to 1989, educational research was ideologically framed and suffered from methodological restrictions. It served political purposes and was mostly theoretical. Empirical research was underdeveloped, in part because of its potential for drawing conclusions which would be critical of the political regime. Czech educational research in the initial stage of transition suffered from its previous distortions. Its scientific prestige was rather low, and its impact on school policy was still weak. (An analytical evaluation and an international comparison are included in J. Prucha, 1992; J. Prucha and E. Walterová, 1992.)

Reducing ideological dependence was only the initial political act toward reforming educational research. Research institutions and researchers themselves were left to determine appropriate innovations. A changing political climate created more suitable conditions for research initiatives. The development of the research on school-family-community partnerships reflected fortunate circumstances:

* an opportunity arose to participate in this multinational project:

* Don Davies, the director of the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE), supported the establishment of a new Institute for Educational and Psychological Research (1990), with international and empirical orientations;

* J. Prucha, IEPR director and the Czech project coordinator, offered personal involvement and leadership;

* access to international experience was provided, with researchers able to visit U.S. research institutions and schools (J. Prucha - E. Walterová, 1992), and participate in international discussions (Chicago 1991, Aix-en-Provence 1993);

* materials and texts were sent by IRE to the research team; and

* an encounter between the researcher, a school principal, and a group of parents reacting sensitively to the changing situation explored ideas for new school policy (see below).

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Základní škola Červený vrch (Basic School Red Hill)

The school is situated in Zone 6 of Prague, about 12 kms from the city center. The school area is located in a housing estate near block-flats. The school building consists of three parts: a central area (classrooms and specialized teaching rooms), the administrative center, and the service center. The school area includes a playground, an athletic stage and a swimming pool.

The basic school was established in 1964 for children from a newly-built housing estate called "Red Hill." During the past three decades the school has offered unified compulsory education for pupils and one-way communication to parents. Every family belonged to the formal Association of Parents and Friends of School, but the organization failed to initiate real school-family-community cooperation.

In November of 1989, a new principal (a former teacher of Czech and English) was elected. She was personally involved in contact with parents and supported cooperation with the community. Later, a group of parents established a Parents' Club and initiated cooperation with school management. By chance, the author of this report, conducting curricular research in the school, came into contact with the school management and with the Parents' Club. Intending to select a school for the IRE multinational project, the research team was then established in this school. Since 1992 the study on school-family-community partnerships has been a part of the school's transformation in the new social context.

Demographics of the pupil population

The students constitute a socially mixed urban population. The parents are primarily skilled workers, technicians, new small businessmen and entrepreneurs of different kinds, and clerks. Ninety percent of the mothers are employed. The number of children in the families ranges from one to four (with an average of 1.9). In 30% of the families, children live with only one parent or with adults other than their own parents. Thirty percent of the families are low income and seventy percent are middle income. Parents' education covers a wide range as well: fathers - 20 % basic, 40 % secondary, 40 % higher; mothers - 10 % basic, 60 % secondary, 30 % higher.

This typical urban school serves children ages six to fifteen years old. In 1992-93, this school enrolled 675 pupils; in 1993-94, the number decreased slightly to 650. A school staff of forty-five includes thirty-five teachers, who together teach twenty-seven classes of students. Special classes are available for gifted children in math and science (from 5th grade). Children with lower academic achievement attended special classes until 1992-93, but they are now integrated into regular classes.

Innovation in the school

The school has developed two innovative programs: "Heuréka" (teaching physics), and "Living Environment and our Health" (teaching ecology). The school's singing chorus, "Sedmihlasek," is very successful. The school received legal identity and financial autonomy in 1993. The school applied for membership in IRE's League of Schools Reaching Out in 1992 and was accepted in January 1993.

The school has an ongoing connection to Charles University. In April of 1994, the school was granted the special status as an affiliated school of the School of the Faculty of Education of the Charles University. This distinction means that the school is a center for practical teacher training and for collaboration with educational research.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Principal problems and aims

Our primary aims and principal research questions emerged from the school's actual situation and from discussions in the research team. The initial problems were identified as follows:

1. The restrictive philosophy of the school, which emphasizes pupils' acquisition of knowledge and skills in an authoritarian atmosphere replete with child dependency, manipulation, and subordination;

2. The divorce between school and family;

3. Parents' distrust of the school and the teachers;

4. A need for commonalities in family and school culture to support the atmosphere for pupils' engaged learning; and

5. A need for family-school partnerships to create conditions for pupils' success in learning.

The action research project finally concentrated on three aims:

* to improve the school climate and learning conditions for children;

* to encourage reciprocal communication and cooperation between school and families; and

* to build contacts with the local community.[1]

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[1] Involvement types 3 and 4 from Joyce Epstein's categories of family involvement were dominant (J. Epstein, 1992).

Key questions

Researchers formulated the following questions:

1) *How are parents' attitudes toward school and school professionals' attitudes toward parents changing in the current process of social transition?*

2) *What do the school and the families expect from each other?*

3) *How can we increase school-family cooperation, through various forms of contact and activities?*

4) *How can we use parents' involvement to build stronger links between the school and the community?*

METHODOLOGY

Characteristics of action research

There was no precedent for action research on this topic in Czech educational research. Previous or ongoing research projects concerning family-school relationships (1989) were descriptive or analytical.

The research included several innovations. First, it worked to simultaneously develop a research methodology and an action strategy. In doing so, the processes of data collection, analysis and evaluation permanently permeated the school climate. Next, community awareness of the research stimulated public input. Finally, the simultaneous research and action changed the roles of the researchers; potential interventions became variables in the research, and the untraditional research team was able to participate in school changes as actors as well as objects of the research.

Research team

The most important roles in the project were played by Jana Matousova, the school principal, Eva Brejchova, the head teacher, and Svatoslav Leitgeb, the chair of the Parents Club Committee. The initial research team (established in 1992) involved one professional researcher, the principal, one head teacher, the chair of the Parents' Club committee, and one student researcher. This group continues to be the core of the research team. The group has gradually incorporated new collaborators and become broader. At the end of the school year 1993-94, the research team added members of the Parents' Club Committee, several teachers, and created ad-hoc groups of parents and pupils. Ways of being involved in the research team were various. The main purpose of involvement was to support initiative, creativity, and the ideas and activities of every participant engaged in the process. The main principle of involvement was to consider every view and finally to reach consensus for joint action. It is clear that all participants used their professional skills, organizational skills, and personal abilities to guide their involvement:

- **The Professional Researcher:** The author played the key role in the research methodology, developing research instruments after discussion with the research team and facilitating data collection, processing, and interpretation. She was in regular contact with the principal and with the Parents' Club Committee, consulting, observing, and participating in major events. She supervised publications of research results and presented working papers and reports addressed to parents and teachers.

- **The Principal:** She played the key role in the coordination of joint actions. She stayed in close contact with the chair of the Parents' Club Committee, informing him of emerging problems and consulting about their solutions. She regularly took part in Committee meetings, offering her room, creating an informal atmosphere, and showing hospitality. She published information on school problems in the school Reporter and consulted extensively with parents.

- **The Chair of the Parents' Club Committee:** He played the key role in coordinating and organizing parents' activities and in directing public relations. He was in constant contact with the principal and with Committee members. He was in close touch with class parents' representatives.

- **The Head Teacher:** She played the key role in producing a newsletter, collected data, and documented and coordinated the creating of materials and writing of research instruments. She helped the principal in all activities. She was able to substitute for the principal in her role.

- **The Student Researcher:** She helped to collect documentation, to administer materials and to process data. As a student-teacher, she gained good practice in consultation, running meetings and observing various school situations.

- **The Parents' Club Committee:** Parents elected ten members -- among them a member of the Czech Parliament, a vice-chairwoman of the District Administration Office and others representing different grades. They shared administrative and material tasks, ensured contacts with class parents' representatives, and created ad-hoc groups with the local community. Committee meetings were forums for discussion, planning, decision-making and evaluation. The forums were open to everybody wishing to participate, to consult, or to help. The Committee gradually became the center of the research activity.

- **Class parents' Representatives:** They were nominated by the parents' community. The group mediated contacts and communication with the core research group, negotiating class problems and contacting teachers engaged in class work.

- **Ad-hoc Groups:** The various parent-teacher-pupil groups were involved in initiation, organization and running of particular events.

Research design

The strategy of the action research was understood as a gradual process which required multiple strategies. First, "The Mirror Strategy" involved the identification of key problems through an investigation of parents' and teachers' expectations. In the next phase, "The Exploring Strategy" included the interpretation, evaluation and comparison of data serving as a basis for decision about possible actions. In response to the attempted actions or interventions, the third strategy was "The Monitoring Strategy" -- continuing observation of the consequences of actions and newly emerging problems, and identification and support of initiatives and experimentation. Finally, "The Tuning Strategy" involved reviewing and revising decisions and developing the activities deemed successful.

Timing

The research was conducted in two stages (1992-1993; 1993-1994). During the first stage, the research focused primarily on the mirror and exploring strategies. A research team was established, the Parents' Club Committee stabilized, and various forms of school-family contacts were identified. The initial results of the investigation were published, covering such questions as, "How do we see our school? What do we want? What do we expect each from other?" Finally, the school received its initial offers of help from parents.

During the second stage, we concentrated more on monitoring and tuning strategies to increase teachers' interest in cooperating with parents and to encourage more active parents' and pupils' involvement and initiatives. Contacts with the local community were increasing. The community developed a new awareness of school activities due to parents' engagement and dissemination of information. Only at this stage was it possible to organize events for the whole school community. The evaluation of research results was useful not only for identifying problems but also for reflections on our experience.

Research techniques and instruments used

Every technique and instrument fulfilled two functions: to collect data and to identify intervention needs. For these reasons every proposed technique and instrument was discussed in detail by the research team. In general, techniques and instruments were similar to those used throughout the multinational research. However, a new elaboration for the particular purposes of this action research was important. Three groups of instruments were used: 1) standardized, 2) semi-standardized, and 3) non-standardized (soft, ad-hoc, developed). I will describe and characterize them below and introduce the setting of the research process as well.

1. Questionnaires. Four questionnaires were developed.

a) Parent's questionnaire: January 1993. Two hundred ninety-three respondents (representing parents of 337 pupils - 55% of the total pupil population). Focal points: parents' attitudes and expectations about school; parents' assistance to children's learning; proposals and recommendations.

b) Pupil's questionnaire 1: June 1992. 56 pupils from 7th grade. Focal points: values; attitudes toward learning and schooling; home learning activities; family support for learning.

c) Pupil's questionnaire 2: May 1994. 100 pupils from 8th grade. Focal points: evaluation of recent changes in the school; learning experiences from the view of school-leavers; recommendations for the school.

d) Teacher's questionnaire: April 1994. 20 teachers. Focal points: Teacher's attitudes toward school-family partnerships; evaluation of recent changes in the school.

2. Interviews

[June 1992, October 1992, May 1993, November 1993, May 1994, July 1994.] Fifty semi-directed recorded interviews with teachers, parents, pupils; 10 semi-directed interviews with the principal and head teachers; three recorded, directed interviews with the principal.

3. Discussions

Collaborative discussions were conducted to discover commonly-held views (June 1992, October 1992, January 1993, April 1993, November 1993, April 1994, May 1994, July 1994). Participants included pupils from 2nd and 7th grades and groups of parents.

4. Drawing pictures

Forty-eight pupils from 2nd grade (May 1994). Pupils drew pictures answering the questions, "How do we learn? Who helps us? How do we evaluate the help?"

5. Other data collection

a) Living with pupils. June 1992. The researcher stayed with pupils for two weeks during the school year in an open air camp away from the city. [The open air camp gave students lessons, outdoor activities, and "leisure activities" (singing, dancing, discussions)]. While there, the researcher taught English and organized games and excursions.

b) Classroom observation in grades 1, 2, 7, and 8. Observations in grades 1 and 2 were of reading, drawing, and play activities; in grades 7 and 8, the researcher observed lessons in language and civics.

c) Teaching pupils (English): June 1992, 7th grade.

d) Periodic observation of school events and interviews of pupils, parents, and teachers.

e) Analysis of school documents: sociological survey, school chronicle, school and class reports, pupils'works, and notebooks.

THE INTERVENTION AND ACTIVITIES

Research design

The research team followed a strategy of a) identifying problems, b) deciding what actions to take, c) enacting intervention, d) calculating subsequent evaluation, and e) conducting new steps of intervention. The process is characterized by gradually increased and intensified intervention.

Activities, events and tactics

Meetings. The project involved regular meetings of several different groups. The Parents' Club Committee met with the principal and head teachers every month and with class representatives every second month. Also every second month, class parents met with class teachers. Individual teacher-parent consultations were organized two times per school year. Finally, whole school parent-teacher workshops were organized two times per school year.

In addition to the regular meetings, special meetings were called as needed. The Parents' Club Committee and ad-hoc groups of parents were organized both as a part of preparation for various activities and in special situations demanding decisions about emerging problems. Additional meetings included lectures and consultations with specialists (psychologists, jurists, educationalists, pediatricians), a teacher-parent workshop on sex education and drug prevention, and a meeting between parents and the principal to discuss the possible division of 2nd grade pupils into classes. This last discussion led to the establishment of the School Foundation. Finally, groups met when necessary to discuss home-school-community collaboration with local press and television reporters.

Written Communication

The school bulletin, Reporter, (*Zpravodaj*) was issued ten times during the 1992-93 and 1993-94 school years. The Parents' Club Committee introduced the bulletin as a form of information on school life and parental involvement. It gradually became a forum for parent-school-community communication. It involved school calls for help, parents' and community members' offers to volunteer, reviews and evaluation of school and pupils' success, and pupils' contributions of poetry or drawings. The Reporter also published information about the action research (Nrs. 3,5,8), helped in data collection, and published data outcomes. The information on the League of Schools Reaching Out was published, as was a letter from Don Davies, the multinational project coordinator.

Experiment on Teacher-Child-Parent cooperation

A new form of family-school-partnerships was attempted in the 1st grade (1992-93) and continued in the 2nd grade (1993-94). The experiment was based on teacher-parent-child agreement. Classrooms had "open doors," allowing parents to visit at any time. Parents provided various forms of help for the teacher outside class, for example, running a Christmas party, excursions, and a book mini-market. Teachers advised parents how to help with homework and home learning activities. Children learned self-respect, independence, and cooperation with the teacher. The positive influence of these activities on pupils' attitudes toward learning were shown by children's drawings and confirmed in discussions with teachers, pupils and parents.

Parents' financial help to school

New problems emerged regarding the school's financial situation. The school management had to solve such problems as payment for textbooks, costs of extra-curricular activities, and reduction of teaching staff. Parents' voluntary contributions to some school activities and sponsorships were new phenomena.

The Parents' Club Committee financially supported new equipment for the pupils' club, buying computers for the school, help for socially handicapped children, and special awards for pupils' success in extra-curricular activities. In addition, parents established The School Foundation in 1993, which gave financial support to the improvement of learning conditions of pupils in the 1st and 2nd grades. Expenses connected with reducing the number of pupils in classes and improving the curriculum (optional and non-compulsory subjects, foreign language teaching) were also shared by the Foundation.

Finally, parents offered sponsorships. The publication of information about school problems and needs stimulated various forms of parental and community help. Computers for the school, an original architectural project for the school club, equipment for laboratories, books and alternative textbooks, material and copy services, furniture for the teachers' club, flowers for decoration, and refreshment for pupils were all given to the school.

Whole school events

Whole school events aimed to bring the school community together, to improve the school atmosphere, and to increase understanding; school-family-community communication was an expected component of the action strategy. However, for a rather long period the vision seemed to be unrealistic. Common whole school activities were unpopular. During the school year 1992-93, some events were conducted on the class level in lower grades, including pupil-teacher-parent trips, Christmas parties, book markets, and flea-markets of children's wear and sports equipment.

The situation changed during the school year 1993-94. The change can be documented by two successful whole school events.

First, the Christmas Party was extremely popular. The event was organized by a group of parents and friends of the school chorus. After the chorus performance, the event culminated in a parent- teacher-pupil group sing-along of carols. A thematic Christmas exhibition of pupils' works prepared by teachers and pupils contributed to an atmosphere of common purpose. The great success of the activity stimulated parents' enterprise to organize a whole school day at the end of the school year.

The other successful event was the campfire in the school yard. This event documented changing attitudes, a different atmosphere, and the growing enthusiasm of participants. This case offers detailed illustrations of the broader shift in school-family-community partnerships.

Preparation for the event first required the development of various ideas over several months. An initial group of parents from the Parents' Club Committee planned to create an event for the "whole school family," bringing together children, parents, teachers, and friends of the school. A core preparatory group of parents and pupils decided finally to organize a campfire as an especially informal event. Everybody who felt an affiliation to the school was invited to participate. Numerous ideas for the program were discussed in classes and in families.

Gradually the whole school community was involved in preparation, including former pupils of the school who created a special band for the event. Many parents spent extensive time and energy preparing the program, wood for the bonfire, and awards. Some of them took leave from their work for the day of the campfire. Preparation meetings became real lessons in democracy. Discussions about the program were a forum for learning how to encounter varying opinions, how to accept different views, and how to find consensus. Older pupils accepted proposals of younger pupils very gently, and the teenage student moderators prepared a program suitable for first grade pupils. A public inquiry to determine the most popular teacher and pupil in the school was announced. Local firms granted free technical assistance, meals, and gifts for pupils. Mothers and school cooks prepared cookies for award winners.

The event took place on July 8,1994, from 5:00 to 10:00 p.m. It was run by parents and pupils, in cooperation with local professionals from the television studios. Addresses by the principal and the Chair of the Parents' Club Committee were followed by pupils' games and competitions, parents' competitions, mini-programs of classes, dancing, and the campfire and fireworks followed. The former pupils' band accompanied the whole program. Because of the initiative of the parents, the local press interviewed participants and published reports. The television group recorded the program and aired a clip of the film the following day.

The most engaged group of parents and teachers met informally several days after the event. The group agreed that the activity was the result of enthusiasm, personal engagement, and initiative. A joint effort to overcome former separation and dissonance in the school community were crucial. The activity was a great success, reflected in changes in the school atmosphere and growing school-family-community partnerships. The evaluation was published in the Reporter (No. 10) and the start of a new school tradition was announced.

DATA ANALYSES AND OUTCOMES

Data on hundreds of issues were collected and processed. Here, we can only report the main characteristics, outcomes and trends involved.

Teachers' attitudes

Teachers' views and attitudes were traced by interviewing and by analyzing questionnaires.

Teachers' initial views on the roles of school and learning (interviews from May 1993) emphasized pupils' knowledge acquisition and preparation for further education. Based on their attitudes toward school-parent partnership, teachers can be placed into three groups: 1) authoritarian: teachers who were surprised by parents' view of school. The parents' criticism was understood as "a picture in a wrong mirror." b) irritated: some teachers were afraid that parents' potential intervention and power were "endangering a professional teacher's autonomy." c) welcoming: teachers in this group welcomed a parent-teacher encounter and reacted to parents' information positively.

Changes in teachers' attitudes were documented (questionnaires from April 1994) as follows: Teachers presumed the role of school to be more complex and broader than they previously thought. In particular, the significance of moral education and personal development were highly rated. Changes in the social and political context undoubtedly influenced teachers' views.

Teachers' attitudes toward school-parent partnerships continued to be rather reserved: 50% of teachers expressed a need for occasional feedback from parents, 30% accepted regular contacts without disturbing the teacher's autonomy, and 15% resisted with the "authoritarian" attitude. However, in general, cooperation with parents was seen as an important contribution to improving work in classes.

The evaluation of contacts with parents demonstrated the importance of information on families' situations (65% of teachers desired this information). However, 35% of respondents were interested in this information only in problematic situations. Evaluation of forms of contacts revealed a preference for individual forms and class meetings. The popularity of parent- pupil-teacher interviews in school increased, but home visits remained low in popularity.

The evaluation of recent changes in the school was rather positive. Fifty-five percent of the teachers marked improvement; 45% did not feel substantial changes; and no one felt the situation had become worse. Teachers particularly noted an improvement in school climate. Other particular issues (school management, collaboration and meetings, pupils' work in classes) were also evaluated positively.

Remarkably, 80% of the teachers wished not to leave the school. Fifteen percent considered leaving the teaching profession for various reasons, mostly related to the state school policy and teacher financing.

Parents' views and attitudes

Reviewing the data from the identification of parents' views about the school (E. Walterová, 1993), we have to emphasize the contrast between parents' initial criticisms and their subsequent growing engagement and understanding of school problems.

The school was initially evaluated as an institution oriented toward equipping children with academic knowledge. The knowledge was often evaluated as "dead," overcrowded with unimportant facts and information. The family had to supply moral education and practical preparation for life in isolation from the work of the school. Parents' criticism particularly concerned teacher-pupil relations and teachers' authoritarian attitudes regarding pupils' self-esteem, interests, and creativity. Parents also criticized the system of assessment, which is mostly quantitative and focused on grades, and unappealing forms of teaching.

Parents' proposals created an ideal picture of the school:

- ***Children should be happy in school.***
- ***Teachers should respect a child's personality and support a pupil's self-esteem and creativity.***
- ***Instruction should be more appealing, varied and practically oriented.***
- ***Assessment should not cause a pupil stress and trauma.***
- ***Extra-curricular activities should be more frequent.***

The confrontation with a changing situation produced gradual changes.

Parents preferred individual forms of assessment and direct personal contacts. In particular, parents wanted to be invited to the school if their children had problems, and they wanted regular, individual consultations with teachers. Meetings between parents and class teachers were also popular. The school bulletin was accepted positively, but later parents expressed impatience -- they wanted to receive the bulletin sooner and more frequently. They not only expected and desired new information about school problems, but also reflections on the research, new actions, and the success of activities.

New forms of contacts proposed by parents and tested by some teachers included regular written reports, consultations initiated by parents, and individual teacher-parent-pupil interviews. Parents' participation in class activities and teachers' home visits were evaluated as insignificant. Common collective activities were initially less popular. Attitudes started to change during the school year 1993-94 (see above). The last data collected showed a preference for whole school events as an opportunity to contribute to the familiarity of the school community and to provide a public role for parents.

Parents were also asked about their guidance and assistance for their children's learning at home. More than half (59.7%) of the parents tested their children at home; 23% did so regularly (in lower grades, about 40%). Twenty percent of the parents assisted their children in learning at home. A very small group of parents (in the highest grades) did not inspect pupils' homework. Instead, they encouraged children's interests through discussion and advice. The 1993-94 year brought remarkable changes. The data from interviews (May 1994) are challenging. The changing social context and new professional duties of parents negatively influenced some parents' ability to help their children's learning. Instead, they offered money, technical assistance and materials. About 20% of the most engaged parents radically changed their attitudes toward school: the former distrust changed into a one-sided dependence on the school.

Parents generally evaluated the improvement of the school climate positively. Specifically, parents appreciated recent changes in school management and the personal involvement of the principal and some teachers. Teachers were evaluated differently but more objectively. Changing parents' attitudes toward school and providing more information and contacts contributed to a better understanding of school problems.

Pupils' views and attitudes

In the initial stage of the research (1992) the question, "Who and what are pupils?" was of a great importance. Expectations, values and attitudes toward learning were identified through the use of a questionnaire for teenagers.

In their survey responses, pupils identified finding a partner for life, gaining independence, having good health and a complete family, and living in a healthy environment among their primary values. Such values as money, success, religion, and physical attractiveness were less important. Education, homeland, and traveling were evaluated as having medium importance.

Seventy-four percent of the pupils felt that education in their families was authoritative, while 13% felt it unauthoritative. The majority of pupils (67.2%) were satisfied, with 41% "rather satisfied" with family education. Every pupil had his or her own study table, 41% had their own rooms, and 57% shared a room with a brother or sister. The frequency of homework activity was as follows: 31.2% of the pupils spent not more than two hours per week, 39.3% spent three to five hours, 19.7% spent five to ten hours, and 9.8% spent more than ten hours. The majority of the pupils, 62.3%, confirmed that parents inspected homework, 18% were learning quite independently, and for 8.2% of the pupils, a parent's help was necessary.

The most frequent leisure activities were sports, music and reading. Sixty-five percent of the pupils had their own library, 47.5% used books from their parents' library, and 42.2% were exchanging books with peers. None used a school library, but 39.3% used a public library. The most frequent cultural activities were visits to exhibitions and museums (59% of pupils), theater (37.7%) and concerts (27.9%). Overall, pupils' learning was mostly influenced by school, parents, and literature.

School graduates

The evaluation of the particular contribution of schooling to pupils' learning made by the students who finished at the school in 1994 confirmed the preference for knowledge acquisition and preparation for further education. A preparation for practical iife and the development of a pupil's personality were evaluated as less important. Remarkably, "fair behavior training" and "differentiation of right and wrong" were absent.

The influence of the school as well as peers, mass media, and self-teaching were evaluated as highly important. Eighty-one percent of the pupils expressed satisfaction with this school; 85% would not have wanted to attend another basic school. Eighty-four per cent would recommend this school to a younger sibling or friend. Eighty-one percent wanted to attend secondary school, while 19% intended to pursue vocational training. Interestingly, in 1994, every pupil was accepted in the assignment he or she wanted to have.

From the perspective of those who completed the program at the school, the outcomes of recent changes were mostly positive. The improvement of the school's equipment and the improvement of parent-school and teacher-parent relations were especially noted. Negative evaluation of changes in pupils' attitudes toward teachers and unchanged teachers' attitudes toward pupils are worth noting. Further pupils' experiences and recommendations for the improvement of the school atmosphere were also incorporated in the questionnaire and were intended topics for future teachers' discussions.

Young pupils

Pupils from 2nd grade (1994) were asked, "Who or what helps you in learning? How do you feel about the help? How do you feel about your own participation in learning?". Answers were provided by drawing pictures. The evaluation was given through marks 1-5 (1 was the highest, as in the school).

A dominating influence of family and home environment was evident. The influence of television, books, and even computers was remarkable. Positive attitudes toward teachers were evident from the level of the evaluation. Thirty-four marks of "1" (out of 37 given to the teacher) were accompanied by another sign (*, +) demonstrating pupils' emotional appreciation of their teachers. Pupils' self-evaluation was rather critical (average rate 1.79), compared to other issues.

DISCUSSION OF OUTCOMES

Changes in attitudes of teachers

Teachers were the most complicated and varied group. Some of them continued to resist any innovation and change. They were indifferent to partnership with parents and preferred to be good professionals in teaching. The smallest but the most active group acted innovatively. Members of the group (mostly younger teachers) were "islands of positive deviation" and examples of changing attitudes. The most numerous group of teachers accepted cooperation with parents as useful, but continued to care about teachers' authority and autonomy. In spite of the hesitancy, every teacher gave his/her phone number for parents' use, participated in whole school events, and developed some forms of contact with parents. Again, individual contacts were preferred.

Changes in parents' attitudes

Parents were initially reserved toward the school. They expected the initiatives for activities to come from the school. Gradual changes in their attitudes were inspired by school management and by a group of parents in the Parents' Club Committee. An intensification of communication particularly emphasized the value of parents' involvement. Parents started to feel like partners once they had more information. With better understanding of the problems of the school, they offered assistance and help. Positive acceptance of parents' views, politeness, and sensitivity encouraged parents' creativity. Now parents have the most initiative in the school community. Parents' Club Committee meetings increasingly became a forum for sharing information, for discussion, and for activity planning.

The best outcomes of the family-school partnerships were achieved in the lower grades, where the school experimented with a teacher-parent-pupil agreement. The agreement aimed to find and solve common problems, to get more information about family situations to the teacher, and to get more information about the classroom to the home. Instituted in grades 1 and 2, the agreement helped to develop a positive climate in the classroom and to increase parents' interest in their children's learning. Interviews with 2nd grade teachers documented teachers' complex information about families supporting individualized approaches to children's learning. These efforts were a very promising start for future development.

Changes in pupils' attitudes

Pupils' attitudes reflected a change in the school's "public meaning." They reacted enthusiastically to the changing atmosphere and to school-family partnerships. Children's desire for dialogue with adults helped several times in the action research; dialogue between parents and children about school problems emerged through the parents' questionnaire or in preparing whole school events. Changes in attitudes were also influenced by the pupils' age. Attitudes of pupils from the lower grades were more dependent on their families' environment and more emotionally influenced.

In spite of the variation, the children were realistic in their evaluation of school and learning. Teenagers' attitudes documented growing criticism of school on one hand and appreciation of teaching on the other. Growing self-esteem of pupils was also evident. Self-reflection of children as learners was emphasized and stimulated.

Pupils' academic achievement and motivation

Pupils appreciated the socializing and communicative role of school more than its role in academic knowledge transmission. They preferred extra-curricular activities, athletic competitions, and shared experiences. Despite this emphasis, positive changes in the school climate could influence even knowledge acquisition and learning success. During the school year 1992-93, just 79% of the pupils passed the entrance examinations; in 1993-94, 81% of the pupils were enrolled in secondary schools, and 19% were accepted for vocational training according to the pupils' own expectations. Many pupils were successful in various competitions among schools, in math, physics, chemistry, and arts. In 1993-94, scores of pupils received awards.

Changing practices in the classroom

Several innovative programs were developed in the upper grades. The project "Heureka," an experiment integrating the teaching of science and problem solving, was considered successful and was publicized as an example of good practice. Teachers began to change methods of pupil evaluation. The frequency of daily testing decreased, and written reports to parents about pupils' progress were developed by several teachers. The written reports, unusual in Czech schools, were themselves an innovation. Particular changes concerned extra-curricular activities. The frequency of excursions, visits and practical activities increased.

Changes in school climate

School climate also changed gradually. Pupils were getting more freedom -- they were offered a more suitable environment, new programs, equipment, space for play and relaxation, and activities including a pupils' club, athletic competitions, and computer lessons. The atmosphere in the school was no longer tense. Good humor permeated the school.

Community attitudes and support

The school stepped out from uniformity and anonymity. A change in the school title further demonstrates the change in attitudes. The previous title, "Alžírská," reflected an ordinary street name. The new title, "Red Hill," concerns the name of the locality and returns to a school tradition -- the original name of the school was "Red Hill." The school has become known and popular in the district. The new links and contacts with the local community were established by parents. Their pride in the school had grown. The parents informed parents from other schools. Parents published information and found help from the community. The community attitudes were also influenced by the involvement of the school management. The community support began, but was still in its initial stage (e.g. new forms of sponsorships).

Influence of the changed school management policy

The door to the principal's room is another symbol of the changes in the school. Until 1989, it was only able to be opened from the inside. Now it opens from both sides. An offer to consult and to discuss issues with parents and local community members created an open atmosphere. This encouraged encounters and partnerships. The consequences of this attitude can be described as follows:

- numerous visits and consultations with individual parents
- increasing proposals by pupils to school management for extra-curricular activities
- growing interest of parents from other city districts to apply for their children to attend this school
- growing number of offers of assistance from the local community (services, material support, sponsorships).

The economic autonomy of the school allows the principal to differentiate teachers' financial rewards. Cooperation with parents and personal engagement in activities were accepted as new criteria for teachers' financial bonuses.

POLICY INFLUENCES AND RESULTS

Effects of state policies on the project

A national education policy supporting the diversification of schools created an opportunity for the development of this project. However, new problems emerged. In particular, the financial situation was tight. The school, receiving juridical and economic autonomy, had to solve a budget shortage, which influenced payment for textbooks and teaching aids, teaching staff reduction, financing of extra-curricular activities, and increased prices of school meals and other services. Given this situation, the assistance of parents and the local community was crucial.

Recently, new problems emerged as the consequences of the economic transformation. For example, the relatively low teacher's salary discouraged young teachers from working in schools. The teaching staff is getting older; most teachers work for more than twenty years. Because education policy and legislation were changing, several experienced teachers left the school for more attractive jobs. Another new phenomenon was the market behavior of schools. Parents received the right to choose a school for their children. Many schools offered various programs, specialized classes and activities, trying to attract pupils. The competition could decrease a school budget, or bring more pupils and increase the budget. Because of the good image of this school, the latter happened.

Influence of the project on school policies

The project was an example of good practice. The school administrators solicited responses from other local schools and also from other city districts. Such activities included visits from other schools with experience in school-family cooperation and forms of activities, and the principal informed colleagues in the principals' club and teachers' association about activities in the school. Numerous individual discussions about the project were held by phone. As an example of good practice, the project had the potential to influence school policy from the bottom up. Informal activities included the dissemination of information and experiences through publication, in seminars, and in workshops.

LESSONS LEARNED

When in 1989 a "velvet revolution" in our country started the process of social transition, changes in education were understood to be a matter of great importance. Not only political reversal and economic prosperity were in society's interest. Parents' participation in educational change was assumed to be of particular importance. Czech parents' positive attitudes toward educational change were revealed in a 1991 study (AISA 1991). Outcomes of findings (see a discussion in J. Prucha, 1991) were very similar to the experience from our research.

Various ideas about education were expressed and written into reform proposals in the first wave of euphoria in the post-totalitarian period (J. Prucha - E. Walterová, 1992, 76-93). One important point was avoided: any social change requires the awareness, acceptance, and participation of those people who will be affected by it. People's visions and expectations as well as previous experience influence any social transformation. No educational reform could be performed from the top down without the participation of affected people. Any human action entails understanding, proving, confronting, and providing. Democratic changes provide needs to contact, to communicate, to find consensus and to participate.

This "human dimension" was reflected by our research team as the most important and the most complicated aspect of the research project. This dimension is the starting point and the focus of the following reflections and considerations.

The achievements of the project

The most important achievements were the restoration of the human dimension that had traditionally existed in Czech schools but had been expelled from them under totalitarianism. The removal of the barriers between the school and families, which had blocked human contacts, was the valid result.

The project was not developed for pure research purposes, but for the substantial improvement of the situation in the school. It was based on encounter, trust, and relationships. It could not have been developed successfully without participants' good will, enthusiasm, and effort. The primary important achievements were found not in concrete actions but in creating trust, which influenced changes in attitudes and in atmosphere. Parents entered into relationships not only with the school but also with other parents -- a phenomenon uncommon until recently, particularly in an urban environment. They became increasingly aware of their own power, rights, and duties. Growing interest of parents in school problems emphasized an interest in their own children's learning and heightened their view of their children as learners.

A new mechanism for relationships was created. Initially the school was the stimulator and moderator of action. Gradually the initiative had been passed from school to parents. Pupils began to learn how to live and act as citizens in society. One example of this change is the discussion and confrontation of differing views and consensual decisions made during the preparation for the Camp Fire. Children's natural desires to help, to contribute, and to act were accepted.

The school could have remained highly authoritative if teachers' attitudes had not changed. Despite some teachers' resistance to innovations, positive phenomena in teachers' activities and attitudes emerged. The process of breaking down authoritarian attitudes and some anxiety about totalitarianism may prove rather slow. Two points offer hope: 1) a deep historical tradition preserving teachers' close contacts with parents and the local community in various periods of history (e.g. National Enlightenment, first decades of the Czechoslovak Republic); and 2) the potential of a new generation of teachers. The policy of the school administration and particularly the principal's attitudes would also support positive changes.

Disappointments and successes

As in any process of social change there can be both positive and negative moments. The main disappointments in this project were some teachers' ambivalence and the rather long period of parents' resistance to participation in whole school events. For example, a rather low number of parents participated in specialists' lectures organized by school management and in workshops of the Parents' Club Committee.

Changes started during the 1993-94 school year when a growing number of parents participated in school activities. All participants declared that the Camp Fire was the most successful event. Other successes were also noted: the school newsletter and the school booklet (anxiously anticipated by pupils and parents); the establishment of the School

Foundation (1993); teacher-pupil- parent partnerships in 1st-2nd grades (1992-1994); a big increase in pupils' achievement and awards in extra-curricular competitions (1994) in math, physics, chemistry, art and literature; and the successful enrollment of school-leavers in secondary school (1994). Long term effects on pupils' learning are expected.

Project participants' perspectives

The question "How will things be different in the school when the project ends?" seems to be redundant after the previous explanations and considerations. The establishment of new mechanisms for building relationships and new forms of communication between school and family, and the experiences and successes of school events, indicate a progressive trend in the school. That trend has had lasting effects. New traditions started. Parents and particularly pupils will be watching and developing the tradition. The chairman of the Parents' Club Committee explained, "It is not possible to leave, to abandon, to stop, to break. We will continue." However, now that the project has ended, the activities will not be systematically analyzed and monitored by a professional researcher.

Effects of participation in the project on the school and participants

Participants' attitudes toward the research itself were diverse. Previously, no research in the school had been popular. Teachers disliked being objects of research without receiving feedback. They felt as if they were being inspected. In this research, they became partners, and they had the opportunity to read reports and information. They could compare their views with those of other participants. They discovered more objective and more complex views on subjectively evaluated problems. They brought attention to unrecognized problems (e.g., teacher interviews in the 2nd grade documented the importance of receiving information from children's pictures, which enriched teachers' self-reflection and completed a view of pupils' learning).

Parents were not previously asked to participate in research or interviewed. This research was a new experience for them, with real effects: the experience stimulated changes and gradually helped them to fulfill their expectations. The parents welcomed the research much more positively than the teachers did. They were not afraid to complete the questionnaire or to be interviewed.

The pupils' attitude toward the research was the most positive. They took it very seriously and responded enthusiastically. The research interested them so much that they tried to imitate research techniques, conducting interviews or asking peers and adults about educational and school problems. The research stimulated discussions and confrontation of views in families (e.g., a great interest in families during the completion of parents' questionnaires, reflection and discussion of picture-drawing in families). School graduates even demanded an opportunity to complete their own questionnaire. The research also stimulated pupils' more engaged and critical view of their learning. The research gradually proved its usefulness in the school context. Research culture permeated the school environment as a new element of its culture.

The final reflection concerned the multinational character of the project. It enriched our intercultural understanding and encouraged empathy in participants' global thinking. Being aware of common or similar problems in different national or ethnic environments, participants were inspired to compare their own situations with those abroad. They were proud to be sharing a progressive activity with friends abroad.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Various recommendations for different areas and levels of the educational system emerged. Bearing in mind the limited scope of the report, I will present the primary recommendations only. An additional article on this topic will be published at a later date.

Recommendations for policy makers: Policy makers should make parents partners in education policy and develop a mechanism of contacts and a system of information for administrators and for school management about parents' partnerships. The best place to start is the school level.

Recommendations for teacher education institutes: Teacher educators should incorporate school-family-community partnerships into a broader model of teacher professionalism and should impart corresponding curricular components into teacher education. Training about forms of home-school contacts should be practiced in pre-service and in-service training.

Recommendations for the Ministry of Education and local governments: School-family cooperation needs legislative and administrative support; involvement and financing of activities dealing with cooperation are crucial.

Recommendations for parents' associations: A network of parental groups on various levels (state, local, school) should be developed to support parents' partnerships in school policy.

COMMENTS ON FIVE COMMON THEMES

Every group the project intended to reach -- parents, teachers, and children -- was reached. However, the differences among the outcomes are significant.

The group affected the most was the children. Children's natural desires for dialogue and interactions with adults, for synergy in their surroundings, for participation in dynamic activities were supported and satisfied. Children's awareness that school and family are partners (or are willing to be) gave them a positive feeling, certainty, and stimulated their engagement in school. Also, the activities influenced children's evaluation of schooling.

The project reached the parents gradually. First, their attitudes toward school started to change through the school's initiative. Parents' involvement was emphasized by mutual communication and by a positive acceptance of parents' views by the school. This change encouraged parents' initiatives and assistance. Parents' attitudes toward school changed substantially.

Teachers were not reached very substantially concerning actions and attitudes as a whole. The positive potential of a small group of dynamic teachers was encouraged. The others were stimulated to change their thinking and grasp basic and conceptual problems of the teaching profession and the teacher's mission.

Teachers guard their traditional values, professional autonomy, personal authority and proved practices. Any change seems endangering to their previous position. Their resistance is a consequence of recent social and professional experience. The changing concept of education and schooling have not reached most teachers. They have not accepted the new, broader model of the teacher's profession. They see themselves as mediators of cognition in special branches (math, science, history, etc.) and do not accept the role of social mediators. The outreach depends heavily on teachers' willingness and readiness to accept changes. Young teachers are the most enthusiastic, progressive and flexible. Teacher education should be seen as the starting point for change, with continued in-service training. The social pressure of the community, particularly the parents' group, will influence changes as well.

Use of the common instruments in general was very constructive. First, the uniform methodology of action research was important for the multinational project to receive equivalent (not identical) data in different cultural contexts and for the research of similar and common problems. The elaboration of instruments demanded a harmonizing of the content with the concrete situation and with each school's culture.

The factors sustaining the project were the challenge of real problems, changes in the social context human factors (enthusiasm, devotion), and institutional support. More suitable conditions to promote the project could be created by better coordination among school policy, school administration, education research, and in-service training.

From a professional point of view, the main effects of the research are as follows:

1) The project proved the possibility of practical purposes of educational research, which were forgotten in previous years when educational research suffered.

2) Data collection and analysis of outcomes must be conducted with caution. They are valid in the dated environment and in the specific school context. However, they do indicate some general tendencies. The contribution of fresh data to the identification of changing school reality is important for the education paradigm, for research and for teacher education.

3) The main effects of the project lie in the research methodology.

- This was the first action research in the Czech education research context on this topic as a part of an international project.
- The methodology is complex (comparison, case study, quantitative and qualitative analyses, experimentation).
- This is an interdisciplinary approach.

- The development of particular research instruments, similar to other international projects, had specific content for this school.
- We used a special research design interlinking research strategy with action tactics.
- We immediately utilized the research outcomes for planning practical activities and interventions.
- An untraditional research team composed of different "role players" was the subject as well as the object of the research.

This new type of project enriched the education research methodology.

4) The researcher led a key role in the project. Besides the position of professional researcher, she had roles as an observer, later as a friendly visitor and consultant, and finally as a member of the school community. The change was effected by her personal involvement, permanent contacts, information, and publication of outcomes.

The researcher's involvement should be also appreciated from the personal perspective as an experience of bringing people together and receiving enthusiastic responses. It was a very positive experience for the researcher.

5) The next statement concerns building school-family-community partnerships in the process of social transition. The reflection of the whole research team can be expressed briefly in the following statement: The process of transformation opened a space and created a suitable social climate for the development of partnerships. Negative experiences from the previous period affected results particularly in the initial stage of the research. New emerging social problems forced the flexibility of action and stimulated new forms of cooperation.

Political changes themselves did not ensure the positive development of partnerships. Political changes did not influence educational policy as the social transformation demanded. Positive results and success of the project could not have been reached two years ago. The effort of the participants was necessary. This consideration is documented by the fact that family-school-community partnership results in our concerned school were not self-evident, but instead were exceptional in the national context.

Results will be valued as long-lasting effects on children's further learning and development. The example of good practice has to be popularized and published to stimulate and teach a lesson for other schools.

THE CHALLENGE

This research concentrated mostly on social and political factors of school-family-community partnerships. Substantial changes occurred and action models were developed. Challenging and remaining problems could be seen also in cultural differences. Various values and cultural models of families and schools influence the relationships and partnerships as well. The analyses of intercultural differences could enrich and complete operational approaches in a changing multicultural society.

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Chapter 6

SCHOOLS REACHING OUT: AN AUSTRALIAN CASE STUDY

By Derek Toomey

This chapter reports on one specific intervention in an Australian Primary School in the State of Victoria which implemented a program of Paired Reading with families of poor readers. The program was managed from outside the school, in a school system in the grip of demoralizing change. The aim was to see if a program of this kind, with a successful track record, could make an impact on home-school relations in such unfavourable circumstances. This chapter is also intended as a contribution to the literature on Paired Reading.

The background

Australia is governed by a federal system with educational services delivered by large state bureaucracies; there is no equivalent of the British LEA or the U.S. school district. One consequence has been the development of large and powerful teacher unions in Victoria.

In 1973 the federal government set up the Australian Schools Commission to channel federal funds for schooling to the states. This body attempted to encourage reform in schools by "organizational renewal" at the school site level. It set up a number of special purpose programs which made funds available in such a way that individual teachers, schools or grass roots organizations could apply for grants to bring in innovations. Examples of programs encouraging this approach were the Innovations Program, the Disadvantaged Schools Program, the Professional Development Program, and the ESL Program. The preferred model which was encouraged was the self-managing school with site-based curriculum development and with democratic processes in which teachers, parents and students took part in decision-making. There was much emphasis on parent participation and involvement in schools, relevant curriculum adjusted to the needs of the school population, and student interest and freshness in learning, as opposed to teachers' authority.

Although the Schools Commission was dissolved in 1988, its influence was far-reaching. In the period from 1982 to 1992 the State of Victoria was governed by a Labor government (ALP) with educational policies very similar to the Schools Commission approach; the school curriculum was controlled by School Councils comprised of elected teachers, parents and students. There was much emphasis and funded support for parental participation in schools. The Victorian teachers' unions had a strong alliance with the ALP and had campaigned strongly for the ALP at all State elections from 1982 to 1992. Expenditure on education by the Victorian ALP government was well above the national average, and teachers' work conditions were good (e.g., low class sizes, generous time release for professional development, generous family leave conditions). In each school an administrative committee comprised of union members vetted all administrative decisions.

In 1992, at a time of severe economic recession, a conservative Liberal-National coalition, committed to eliminating a huge budget deficit, won government in Victoria with a landslide majority. At the time of writing in 1994 we have seen two major programs of school closures in the name of economic rationalism with hundreds of schools closed and thousands of teachers unemployed. At the time of our project, which began in April 1993, morale in the schools was at rock bottom. Many teachers feared losing their jobs and the grass roots strength of teachers which had characterized the 1980s was replaced by a great increase in the formal powers of school principals, buttressed by their authority to declare a teacher "in excess" and hence likely to be eliminated. The once powerful teachers' unions seemed unable to defend their members and prevent any of this from happening. In 1993, I wrote in a proposal document,

> *In this climate, getting teachers to foster parent involvement as an add-on to their normal duties (and this is how it is still seen) faces great difficulties, especially bearing in mind the background of teachers' previous hard-won power and independence.*
>
> *The strategy we are using at the school is to start with two specific programs which, experience tells us, will be successful in improving children's school learning. In my view, this is what teachers will take most notice of. At each step along the way, teachers must be consulted and their views taken account of.*
>
> *Also programs have been chosen so as to bring in parents of poor readers, among whom we are likely to find some of those who are most difficult to reach, and most in need of support. Enthusiastic parents perhaps may be more readily recruited.*

> *The plan is quite simple: to start with a small-scale program of proven effectiveness in affecting student learning via parental teaching and to build on the anticipated success. The six-week program in question is (a) involving parents of poor readers at the Prep (Kg) level in reading to their children and in shared reading, thence progressing to Paired Reading, and (b) a program of parents hearing their (poor reader) children reading at grades 1, 2 and 3 using the Paired Reading method. These families to be visited at home by teachers taking a course at La Trobe University.*
>
> *Once success has been established this will be intensively publicized in the school as a lever to both parent involvement and teachers' sympathy towards it.*
>
> Toomey, 1993a

While most of the League of Schools Reaching Out Multi-National Study schools began their programs in 1992, I was not able to be involved until 1993, being on study leave in the U.K.

"Woodvale Primary," our study school, lies in the city of "Bottom," part of the northern suburbs of the metropolitan Melbourne. It is a mixed area of industry and low-cost housing, of lower socio-economic status. At time of the 1991 Census, of persons aged fifteen and over, 45.2% had an income of less than $12,000 p.a.; 16.6% of the workforce were unemployed. Of the adult population, 38% completed full-time education by the age of fifteen or younger.

The area has a multi-ethnic population comprised of recent arrivals, second stage settlers and a long standing Anglo-Australian and Irish-Australian working class. Some 41.5% of the population above the age of five spoke a language other than English, as recorded by the 1991 Census.

Rationale

The effectiveness of Paired Reading

The 1980s had seen in Britain a great growth in the practice of involving parents in their children's reading development by sending books home from school for the children to read to their parents. This development had been initially stimulated by the frequently cited

Haringey Project (Tizard, Schofield and Hewison, 1979) which had shown remarkable success in improving grade 2 students' reading performance by having parents listen to their children read aloud over a two-year period, with no particular method of learning reading prescribed. In 1992 a review of over forty studies comparing the "parent listening," Pause Prompt Praise, behavioral, and Paired Reading approaches showed that attempts to use the parent listening approach did not repeat the earlier success of the Haringey Project. The other three approaches all showed a high level of success with poor readers, but, of these, Paired Reading had yielded by far the largest number of studies (Toomey, 1993b; 1994). While there was no experimental proof that Paired Reading was superior to the other two methods, for a number of reasons it is more "user friendly" in schools.

In this method, the child chooses a book in school to take home. The reading episode begins with the parent and child reading aloud simultaneously, which continues until the child signals that he or she will read aloud alone. This continues until the child makes an uncorrected error at which point the parent begins reading again with the child.

The aim of the method is to give maximum support to the child and to minimize his opportunity to make errors. In the simultaneous reading phase there is a continuous flow of syntactic and semantic cues to help the child gain meaning. The child's independent reading is aided by the mastery of meaning gained through the simultaneous reading. The reading aloud session is organized so as to avoid the child labouring to read in a halting, staccato manner which can characterize the other methods.

The method is extremely simple and requires little training of parents. It relies on the child's own agency in choosing the book and controlling when to read alone. The child is praised by the parent for independent reading, self correction, reading difficult words, and for effort. There is a gradual fading of support for independent reading. The method encourages completion of the text and provides a model. The method has been successfully implemented in a large number of schools (Toomey, 1993a, 1994).

The need to reach out

Previous work carried out by the author in schools serving socio-economically disadvantaged populations had suggested that the children most at risk of having difficulties in learning to read are those who do not respond successfully to initial attempts to teach them in school and whose parents do not give them help at home with learning to read because they cannot, or are not aware of how important their help can be (Toomey, 1989). This research found that Primary schools serving disadvantaged populations in Victoria typically have home reading programs and make attempts to involve parents by giving advice and support about how to help their children's reading development. But usually those parents who respond are a minority of "enthusiast" parents, and those parents who do not readily visit the school may cut themselves off from this advice because of their uncertainty and lack of confidence or lack of awareness of the value of their help to their children even though they are usually very concerned about their children's success in school. The child who does not respond successfully to the teacher's efforts is thus likely to be without further support and is in danger of getting into a vicious circle of failure. It is particularly important to reach out to involve the parents of such children.

Reaching out and Paired Reading

The literature on Paired Reading provides little evidence on the question of these "left out" families. Very little is written about recruitment into Paired Reading programs, beyond the information that they are concerned with poor readers, sometimes with the reading criteria for entry explicitly stated. The issue of which families of children eligible for the program failed to become involved is not addressed. Indeed there is not a great deal of evidence on how faithfully parents adhere to the Paired Reading method. One study by Elliot (1989) provided evidence that parents had typically helped their children previously and that often the Paired Reading method was grafted on to a previously practiced method. A study by Dragonetti et al. (1992) produced case studies of parents involved in a Paired Reading program for secondary school students. These families were not socio-economically disadvantaged. Some variation in parents' implementation was found, with a small number of parents putting undue pressure on the students and a small number of students being quite resistant to parental efforts.

The present study attempted to reach as many as possible of the parents involved and to gain evidence of the methods of implementation the parents used.

Supporting the parents' implementation

The evidence above suggests that some parents may be in need of help in implementing Paired Reading. Evidence from the behavioral and the Pause Prompt Praise studies indicates that, before receiving training, parents of poor readers are disinclined to praise their children's efforts at reading and are disinclined to give them supportive prompts (Toomey, 1993a, 1994). This study provided support for parents' helping activities at home by the use of home visits.

An external intervention

Given the demoralized state of the teaching force and the lack of resources caused by draconian funding cuts, we could not expect the school to provide resources for the labor-intensive program of home visits. We therefore planned to use volunteer help from trained, experienced teachers taking one of my courses at the university, which required teachers to implement work with parents. The teachers agreed to take part after the project had been explained to them. University classes were used to explain the program and to train the teachers for their role, and the normal requirements for class contact were reduced in recognition of the time spent in fieldwork.

The external nature of this intervention is at variance with the model of "organizational renewal" of the Schools Commission, which emphasizes the importance of engaging the personal commitment of teachers in a school to any innovations -- that the changes will be most effective if the teachers feel ownership of them. It was planned to consult with teachers but to try to avoid making any demands upon their time.

The research questions are thus:

a) *The effectiveness of Paired Reading.* Involving parents of poor readers in their children's reading development using the Paired Reading method has been found to be effective in the U.K. Will it be effective in this Victorian disadvantaged school?

b) *The need to reach out.* What will be the effects of making a genuine attempt to reach out to all the parents of poor readers identified in the study?

c) *Reaching out and Paired Reading.* Is Paired Reading appropriate to all parents of poor readers of the appropriate ages?

d) *Supporting the parents' implementation.* What happens when attempts are made to give special attempts to support the parents' implementation by the use of home visits made by experienced teachers?

e) *An external intervention.* Will an external intervention of this kind succeed in mobilizing parent-teacher cooperation?

Putting the plan into operation

After initial discussions with the school's principal, a submission was made to the School Council, which approved a plan for the school to apply for membership to the League of Schools Reaching Out. The principal discussed the proposal at a staff meeting, and the staff also approved the plan.

An initial discussion was held with the teachers in grades Prep (Kg), 1, 2, and 3 about the two proposed projects. The teachers insisted that we begin with help for those children who were already experiencing difficulty; they showed some resistance to the proposal to work with families of Prep level children and eventually that proposal was abandoned.

The teachers nominated poor readers in Grades 1, 2, and 3 to take part in the study and agreed to send home books regularly with the children as part of the school's regular home reading program. There was a composite Grade 3/4 class whose teacher also nominated a Grade 4 child to take part.

Evaluation of the program

The LSRO school climate and teacher questionnaires were completed by all the school staff and the parent questionnaire sent to a random sample of 100 parents. To encourage participation, a prize of a $20 record voucher was assigned to each of the three questionnaires and a random respondent received the prize in each case. The volunteer teachers conducted individual reading tests using the Neale analysis (Neale, 1988) before and after the program, and parents and teachers each filled in questionnaires reporting on the students' interest in reading before and after the program. The teachers were also asked to make assessments of the students' reading competence before and after the program, using the Griffin profiles of reading attainment (Griffin, 1988). In addition, the teacher volunteers and the research assistant kept detailed notes of their visits, recording the parents' implementation of the method and any other information bearing on success of the project. They received much guidance regarding this procedure in the university classes, which provided regular occasions for discussion of the project and its development.

Each volunteer tutor worked with two families and visited them at least four times. The teachers nominated a total of twenty-two families (involving 24 target children). Letters were sent to each family, providing advice about the scheme, inviting their participation, and explaining that their child's teacher had nominated their child as likely to benefit from the program. The letter also said that the parents would be visited at home to help them play their part in the scheme. Sixteen families replied saying they would take part and would attend either the day time or evening briefing session. All non-replies were followed with phone calls which continued to be made until contact was established, with the exceptions of one silent and one disconnected number. This was a somewhat lengthy process.

Sixteen families sent at least one parent to one of the meetings. At the meetings the method and its benefits were explained and demonstrated, volunteers were introduced to their assigned families, and initial arrangements were made. Families not represented at the meeting were called and the research assistant conducted home visits until all had been contacted. One parent, who had attended the meeting but who expressed some doubts about having the instructional sessions at home, told the research assistant that she and her husband did not speak English well and was so evasive that that her response must be counted as a refusal. Subsequently, two of the families dropped out, although we have a case study for one of them. One of the teacher volunteers also dropped out and her visits were completed by the research assistant.

We had a high level of commitment to recruiting the maximum number of target families not only because of the reaching out philosophy, but also because we wanted to ensure that we were indeed reaching the target families. Out of the original twenty-two we had one refusal and two drop-outs.

Results

This report will concentrate on the case studies developed by the volunteers and the research assistant. There are nineteen case studies which reported on the parents' implementation of the Paired Reading method and anything in the family environment or general circumstances which was relevant to it; two of these case studies have been excluded because the teacher volunteer missed a number of visits and wrote the case studies in an equivocal manner, leaving us with seventeen.

Approximately ten of these reported that the parent (usually the mother) implemented the method successfully and managed the situation well. In three families the implementation could not be unequivocally reported as badly done. One of these parents worked effectively but was inclined to make negative comments even though the child was doing well. Another attempted to implement a phonics-based method from his school days and reproved his son for failing to follow him. In time, however, this parent was convinced to take a more positive and less demanding approach which seemed to work well. Another parent started off well, but over time her commitment declined, as did that of the child. So, of the original twenty-two families, just over half of them implemented Paired Reading effectively. In all of these families but one the children were cooperative and took part willingly. One boy lacked confidence and was reluctant to participate, but was won over by the interest, care and encouragement of his parents; eventually, he could be seen gently nudging his father to stop reading and leave him to do it alone. In only one of these families was the family environment rated as noisy or distracting (e.g., children fighting or interfering, television or radio left on).

Evidence which suggested that the Paired Reading sessions were going well included:

* How seriously the family took the reading sessions. *"On my initial visit, it was obvious that the family considered the Paired Reading to be very important."*

* Their interest in the process. *"...During every visit the mother had numerous comments and questions about the Paired Reading."*

* Their commitment. *"By the end, however, Mrs. A was much more talkative and trusting and expressed a firmly held belief that parents have to be prepared to put in time with their children when they need parents' help."*

* How well parent and child get along in the sessions. *"I can clearly see a great improvement in the way they interact together."*

* Adherence to the Paired Reading method.

- Efforts to obtain or buy books.
- Absence of interruptions.

Of the remaining cases most of the difficulties appeared to flow from the parents' inability to read English and/or manage the situation effectively. In one case the mother attempted to make the method work, but the child ignored her attempts, was very easily distracted, and did not participate in a meaningful way. The class teacher had similar difficulty with this child, whose lack of reading competence made her inappropriate for inclusion in the study, since Paired Reading requires a minimal level of reading competence for the child. In yet another case the parent had a poor command of English, and the child flatly refused to take part with either the home visitor or the parent. In two further cases the parent could not read English. In one of them the child responded well to the home visitor and was keen to take part. In the other, the home visitor engaged elder siblings of the target child to do Paired Reading with him, which worked better with the 17-year-old than with the 10-year-old elder sister.

It is interesting that in three cases of children who were uncooperative, the parent did not appear to manage the situation effectively. In seven cases in which the environment was noted as noisy and unfavourable to Paired Reading, the parent involved either did not read English or could not manage the situation well. There was only one case of a noisy environment in which this was not true. So it seems that uncooperative children, a distracting family environment, and ineffective management of Paired Reading tend to go together, though no inference is drawn about the causal relations involved.

Growth in reading competence

The Neale Analysis of Reading Ability-Revised (Neale, 1988), an individual test which has been widely used in the British studies of Paired Reading, was administered to the children in their homes by the home visitors as pre- and post-tests. Some of the home visitors were quite critical of the test. There were three six-year-olds who appeared to make definite improvements, with parents giving good support, but who failed to register a reading age of 5.0 or above on the test at both testings. Another case was a seven-year-old, assisted by his grandmother, who made great progress in terms of his enthusiasm, interest and reading competence, as perceived by the home visitor and by his class teacher. He was recognized as "pupil of the week" for his "improvement in reading." This was one of the success stories of the project; his grandmother now works as a volunteer, hearing reading in the classroom. However, the Neale Analysis showed little overall growth in reading competence. With results of this kind it is hardly surprising that the volunteers were critical of the test.

Visitors criticized the facts that the test books were unattractive and of a style unfamiliar to the children, that the language was too formal, and that the testing procedure was unfamiliar. The claim that the test is suitable to 5:0 - 6:0 year olds was not borne out by our experience. Several older children failed to register a score on pre- and post-tests.

We had also planned to obtain teachers' assessments of the children's reading development, pre- and post-, using the English Profiles, a teacher's assessment. However, there was such a delay in the teachers' completion of the follow-up assessments (3 months and 5 months) that these results were unusable.

If we divide the families between those who managed the sessions productively and those who did not, a meaningful picture emerges.

We have pre- and post-test results on the Neale for five children in the latter group (one child had refused to participate in the test and in the Paired Reading). Only one of these managed to make a score on the test, i.e. a score above a reading age of 5:0 (6:06 before and 6:0 after - in reading age-comprehension). We have complete data for twelve of the children whose mothers appeared in the case studies to be effectively helping the children; three of these were six-year-olds who failed to register pre- and post-test scores. The gains of the other children in reading age (comprehension) over the six-week period of the project were, for reading comprehension (in months): 25, 12, 8, 4, 14, none, 12, 24. One other child failed to make a score. Counting the four non-scores, this still makes an average of 8.2 months gain in reading comprehension. If we combine both groups the average gain is 5.4 months which, if anything, illustrates how meaningless these average scores can be.

Toomey's (1993b:p.14) review showed that in nineteen studies of the effects of Paired Reading the average length of the program was 1.9 months, slightly longer than our six-week program, and the average gain in Reading Age - comprehension was 13.0 months. In our program the average gain was 8.2 months.

Conclusions and implications

In 1994 the Victorian Directorate of School Education set up a statewide "Parents as Tutors" program to be introduced in all Primary schools. This involves a six-session sequence of instruction for parents in assisting their children's educational development, an important component of which is helping children's literacy development. Special coordinators were appointed to clusters of schools to provide training and support. The Directorate had clearly received the message that parents can be an extremely valuable resource in assisting their children's educational development. This has to be regarded as a victory for those researchers who have for so long been advocating programs of parental involvement of this kind. The Ministry should be congratulated on this venture, but the results of the present study also suggest a challenge for such programs.

Who was reached

This project made particularly careful attempts to contact and involve all the families of poor readers nominated by the teachers. We were especially eager to reach out and involve them. It is my belief that we managed to involve parents who are often missed in similar programs and that difference, to some extent, accounts for some of the difficulties encountered by the home visitors. While I do not have firm comparative evidence with other studies to make a strong claim, I believe that many parent involvement programs in schools fail to include some of the hardest-to-reach families and that often these families are not able to give the support to their children's education which they would like to be able to give. It must be remembered too that we were dealing with a socio-economically depressed neighborhood with a multi-ethnic population. Also we were dealing with families of poor readers. I do not assume that this must *inevitably* mean that the children came from families unable to give them the help we were seeking. But the substantial evidence of family environment influences on children's reading development (e.g., Teale, 1985; Mason and Allen, 1986) suggests that some at least might encounter some difficulties in this process.

Also there is the question of the children's competence and interest. The parent involvement strategy is a useful one, without doubt, but it will not necessarily work for all children.

Programs like the Parents as Tutors program should not be introduced without special efforts made for individual children who need them, such as the Reading Recovery program. Moreover, it is important that in these cases parents are not left with the feeling that the difficulties are their fault.

Nor is it true that these parents did not care -- far from it. Our home visitors reported that a number of parents entreated them to continue helping their child. Some offered money to them to give individual tutoring. Some of the parents claimed that they thought the program was intended for the visitor to teach the child, not the parent, though the letter of invitation makes clear that that is not the case. So we have a picture here of some parents greatly worried about their children's reading development, not able to help as they would wish, and desperate to get something done. It is my belief that this population is not so unusual that these problems are unique. Yet how often does one find this problem referred to in programs involving parents in their children's reading development? As a specialist in the area, I am able to say that most reports of such interventions concentrate on the successes and leave out these difficulties. (It is possible that this problem is concealed in the Paired Reading literature by the experimental method which lumps together the majority of successful cases with a minority of unsuccessful cases, the average gains reported concealing these differences.)

We had found that some families could not give help, in spite of the supportive home visits we provided; they needed other support we could not provide -- e.g., with literacy competence and parenting skills. Estimates of the proportion of adults who are functionally illiterate in Australia vary between ten and twenty per cent (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment Education and Training, 1991), and there is a higher incidence among persons of lower socio-economic status (Wickert, 1989). We could therefore expect at least two to four of our families to present such difficulties -- probably double that among this particular population at a conservative estimate. Yet this school is typical of Victorian Primary Schools in that it has a home reading program but has no program to assist parents who do not read English. This absence contrasts with the forty-three per cent of LSRO schools in the United States reporting an ESL or GED program for parents (Davies, Burch and Johnson, 1992).

Teacher professionalism. This is often cited as a factor which keeps parents and teachers apart, inducing an irrational awe of teachers' professional competence on the part of parents, and for the teachers, a sense that the technical complexity of teaching is beyond most parents. Particularly serious is the mindset it may encourage, which assumes that schools above all are the places for legitimate learning and that non-school learning is outside the zone of relevance for teachers.

A recent study of secondary teachers in Victoria has shown an increasing sense of proletarianization on the part of teachers, an awareness of their loss of social status, accompanied by a hardening of trade union loyalties and a sense that pay and conditions are the important rewards for teachers rather than the rewards of status and professional service (Isaacs, 1991). The depressed morale of the teaching service was referred to earlier and this did not provide a background encouraging teachers to take on extra work by looking beyond the classroom to involve parents.

One factor which caused some difficulties in the program was the supply of books. The school has a regular home reading program in which books are sent home with children for the parents to read with them. There is also a card accompanying the book for parents to make comments on. Some home visitors found that the books had not been changed and were told that the teacher had not sent home a book. Enquiries at the school suggested that it was the children who were misleading their parents. One can well imagine this to be so in the case of the uncooperative children, and perhaps among others. The scheme was addressing poor readers for whom reading may have been seen as a chore, especially if their home reading sessions with their parents did not go well. On the other hand, this complaint was made by some of the more committed parents, who made their own arrangements to obtain books; there does therefore seem to be some foundation for the complaint, which had been passed on to the school.

Comments from some parents indicated that this issue had been a difficulty before this scheme had begun. That friction had occurred in the past is suggested by remarks made at a planning meeting with the class teachers involved -- to the effect that parents would not now be able to say that not enough was being done for the children concerned. The home visitors did encounter criticisms of the school.

However, the intervention mounted was an external one which was not based on a strong program of professional development for teachers, nor an involvement process that might induce some sense of ownership of the project on the part of the teachers. The next section indicates that the project did not succeed in exciting the teachers about parent-teacher cooperation.

Sustaining the program. Did the program follow through to other parts of the school? The following measures were taken.

1. An attempt was made to involve teachers of children in Grades 4, 5 and 6 to implement a program of Paired Reading by parents of poor readers. The teachers refused to take part.

2. Parents who successfully implemented the Paired Reading method at home were asked to use the method as classroom volunteers. One grandparent agreed to do so and is now part of the school's classroom volunteer program. Unfortunately, other parents who were asked could not take part because of employment commitments.

3. Parents who had experienced difficulty in implementing the method came into the school and took part in sessions in which the deputy principal demonstrated how to conduct the program with their children. This training was provided away from the family environment and its threats to parental control. These sessions were financed out of LSRO funds to pay a relief teacher to take the Deputy Principal's classes.

4. A research assistant was employed in a home visit program with parents of Prep children nominated by teachers as likely to need help. The program involved parents in reading to the children. As a result of this program, one parent was referred to an adult literacy class. This program came to an end for lack of further funds.

5. A volunteer hearing reading program was set up in a nearby church. The volunteers were mostly older people.

6. In 1994 an attempt was made to repeat the home visit program with teacher volunteers, but only one parent replied to the school's invitation to parents to participate.

One cannot conclude that this project succeeded in transforming home-school relations in the school. Nonetheless, a strong emphasis on home-school relations is not a new thing in Victoria, so it does not have the appeal of a new innovation that it might have had in some of the other countries involved in the larger project.

We hoped that the project would be so successful in involving parents and children that teachers would take a greater interest. But this change did not occur. As a result, I think that there is probably truth in the idea that teachers must feel some ownership of a project before they become involved in it. Strategies to engage teachers in decision-making about teacher-parent relationships might have more success than this project did.

The common instruments. The school climate, teacher and parent questionnaires were administered within the school at the commencement of the project. For each of these instruments a prize was given to the person whose completed questionnaire was drawn out of a hat. This method was successful in attracting a good return from the staff (an 82% response rate); for the parents the response rate was 34% (from 100 parents randomly selected). The prizes were commented on favourably. However, the questionnaires at the end of the project were not completed, in spite of the offer of prizes. One cannot help but feel that the administration had become disaffected with the project, perhaps because of the criticisms of teachers it had initiated.

A personal commentary

For some time it has been my concern that when disadvantaged schools reach out to families they often do not contact the families most in need (Toomey, 1989a), especially those in which the child is not doing well in school and the parents lack the confidence or competence needed to help. There are parents who are not very active in their children's schooling and development, but who do become actively involved when they learn that their child is "at risk" (Toomey, 1989b). There are also plenty of parents in disadvantaged schools who provide a family environment well supportive of their children's school development (Toomey, 1989a). Unfortunately it is usually these two types of parents who absorb the parental involvement resources in disadvantaged schools (Toomey, 1989a).

Adults weak in literacy will usually conceal this from the school. Parents of the kind we found who lacked the parenting skills needed to help their child are also a not very visible group. I have become convinced that schools are not well-equipped to deal with these problems.

Currently I am director of an Australian federal government national project which is surveying intergenerational family literacy practice in Australia (Toomey, 1994) -- programs which deliver literacy education for parents to meet their own needs, but also with the rationale that their children will benefit through the parents. Sometimes companion programs for children are involved (as in the Even Start Programs in the U.S.A.). We have more investigation to do, but the schools and pre-schools appear to be doing very little in this area. We are finding that there is much more awareness of these issues in adult literacy programs, community-based adult education providers, and programs of family support provided by social welfare agencies.

In one country town in Victoria there is a community-based adult education provider which runs a course in how parents can help in their children's education. Many of the parents who come are themselves weak in literacy, according to the teacher of the programs (who had taught some of the parents when they were in school). She argues that these parents will not approach the school because they are afraid that their low literacy will be detected and this will harm their children.

The project has uncovered other evidence indicating the reticence of such parents and the need for methods of recruitment which are sensitive to their reticence. In Victoria, Neighbourhood Houses and local learning centres are used to dealing with people weak in literacy and have a reputation as being especially accessible to this population. Adult literacy teachers there have to develop the interpersonal skills and open, accepting approach which is needed. These institutions usually also provide occasional child care. It seems to me that intergenerational family literacy programs, programs to help low-confidence parents assist their children's educational development, and programs of parenting in such centers are likely to attract the population in question. The presence of occasional child care makes it possible to experiment with bringing children into the program.

Schools could be useful sources of advertising these courses (as has been done in some successful intergenerational family literacy programs). Programs of family support run by social welfare agencies would also be an important source of recruitment and could be used as a resource for parenting programs. Funding for such programs should come from sources which provide regular adult literacy programs, regular schools and family support programs.

However, parent involvement programs should not be regarded as a panacea for all problems. It is the school's role to provide schooling. There are many forces which impinge on children's educational progress, potentially including the teacher, the peer group, the child's natural ability, the organization of the school, or the resources available. Involving parents should never be an excuse for not providing well-resourced schools. In particular, there is a need for well-resourced special programs for children who are less successful in their literacy development and whose parents are not able to help them.

Finally, this study adds to the evidence of the success of using the Paired Reading method for parents to assist their children who are poor readers. It suggests that there is a need for more attention to be paid to the issue of the parents' adherence to the Paired Reading method. It also suggests the need for more case studies and for attention to the recruitment processes into programs of parental involvement in schools.

Notes

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Chapter 7

PROJECT *EDUCANDO JUNTOS*

(Family and School Educating Together)

By Bernardita Icaza

Project Team: Bernardita Icaza, Liliana Mayorga, Alexis Arellano
Collaborators: Alice Mulasso, Paolo Nagni, Jim Morin

Introduction

The present study was developed by Bernardita Icaza and a team of professionals from the Project *Educando Juntos* (Educating Together), within CIDE's Family School Program.

CIDE, Center for Research and Development of Education, is a private foundation, founded in 1964 in Santiago, Chile. Its purpose is to develop, research and diffuse innovations which contribute to the national goal of improving the quality of education in Chile.

Educando Juntos began in March 1991, with the purpose of improving the conditions for children's development and learning, by involving parents in the school as educators of their children. The project responds to the lack of educational interaction and communication between the school and family during the early schooling years (Kindergarten to grade 2). It focuses on the first school years in order to positively influence the fundamental stage during which children acquire basic reading and writing skills.

In 1991, we were invited by the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) to be a part of a Multi-National Study regarding family-school partnerships. Our experience with issues related to family and school motivated us to participate within a network of people who are researching and innovating in this field.

The League of Schools Reaching Out documents which we received from Boston made us aware of many possible links. Although our countries are marked by differences, we also found similarities on issues that arise between parents and teachers which seem to be universal: for example, an initial mistrust and mutual blaming between schools and families. We also noted that we share a common belief and interest in developing closer links between home and school as a means of improving the learning conditions of children.

To participate in the Cross-National Study, we proposed a case study on the strategy and educational activities between family and school implemented during 1992 and 1993, by the "Educando Juntos" project, in Municipal Schools of La Florida, Santiago, Chile.

It is important to point out, though, that this study is embedded in the activities of the whole *Educando Juntos* project, which were taken into consideration in the preparation of this case study. Therefore, in this paper, we occasionally interweave analysis of other activities with the discussion of activities specific to the case study.

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This case study was possible thanks to the collaboration and team work of a number of people:

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1. The Setting

National Context

Since the late 1980s, after having achieved the goal of providing access to education for most children, Latin American countries addressed the goal of improving the quality of education. The educational system in Chile, for example, reached levels of school attendance during the 1960s of 96.5% of children in elementary school and 49.73% in secondary school.

In the 1980s, there was a dramatic reform to decentralize the administration of schools, transferring control of all public schools from the Ministry of Education to municipalities. Nevertheless, the quality of education did not change after this administrative decentralization. Evaluation of elementary school children between 1988 and 1990 revealed they have obtained slightly over 50% of required knowledge.[1]

In 1990, after the re-establishment of a democratic government, the country began a process of democratizing the educational system, in which improving the quality of education became the central goal. The emphasis shifted to meaningful learning, creativity, innovation and increasing the relevance of the learning objectives and contents in relation to the social and cultural reality of the students. This was accompanied by a policy of "positive discrimination," in which children from the poorest sectors are given priority in terms of the Ministry's initiatives.

The democratization process in its first period (1990-1994) consisted of preparing the conditions for more profound transformations to be realized in 1995. The transition period included elements taken from the past government, the most important being the administrative decentralization of education.

Among the new programs are:

a. Program to Improve Educational Quality and Equity ("Programa de Mejoramiento de la Calidad y Equidad de la Educación, MECE"). This program assigns resources for the improvement of the quality and equity of education at the pre-school, basic school, and secondary school levels.

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[1] Unicef y Fundación Andes, *Aportes de la Empresa Privada al Mejoramiento de la Educación en Chile*, Santiago, Chile, May 1994.

b. A Program for the 900 poorest schools ("Programa de las 900 Escuelas") benefits, through teacher training and teaching materials, ten percent of the poorest schools in Chile.

At the end of 1994, a national committee was commissioned by President Eduardo Frei to develop a proposal for the modernization of the educational system. The committee's report concluded that the highest priority is to provide a general improvement of quality in all schools. To do that, the proposal indicates, secondary education must be reformed and the teaching profession must be strenghened.

Prerequisites include: facilitating the development of more effective schools, giving them more autonomy and flexibility for their self-management; offering more public information to diverse social sectors; increasing both public and private investment to facilitate the modernization of education.[2]

The Institution: Center for Research and Development of Education

Since 1972, CIDE has developed projects that aim to empower poor families to improve conditions for their own growth and for the development and education of their children. In 1991, reflecting on the work of these projects encouraged us to work toward reuniting and enriching the work on possible partnerships between family and school to benefit children's growth and learning.

As a result the **Family-School Program** was created, with the purpose of intervening in poor social-economic sectors, in order to identify factors that influence children's development and learning during their transition from home to school and during their school years.

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[2] Comisión Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación. *Informe para su Excelencia el Presidente de la República, Don Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle.* Santiago, Chile, diciembre de 1994.

Within the Family School Program, two projects addressed family-school involvement in relation to children's development and learning:

- A "Sexual Education Program" was designed in 1988. It offers training workshops and educational materials to parents and teachers, in order that children and adolescents may obtain guidance from parents and teachers throughout their school years.
- The *Educando Juntos* project started in 1991.[3] Its purpose is to promote collaboration between parents and teachers of Kindergarten, grade 1 and grade 2 children, in order to better support their development and initial learning process.

2. THE EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION

> *"Creo que falta también, y lo voy a decir con la mano bien en el pecho, bien honestamente, pienso que faltan estrategias o metodologías para manejar situaciones con los apoderados, yo sé que hay una relación con los apoderados, pero también pienso que falta algo de parte del profesor, a lo mejor manejar más estrategias...no sé cómo, para llegar más para romper esa barrera en que el apoderado no llega a la escuela, y normalmente cuando vienen, por ejemplo yo mando llamar a las mamás y vienen como asustada, como pensando, ¿qué pasó,¿ ¿qué hizo mi hijo?"*[4]
>
> —PEDAGOGICAL COORDINATOR, SCHOOL 1

When asking parent leaders to identify the learning needs parents have, they say:

> *"Pienso que debe ser poder enseñar o poder ayudar a los niños en la casa. Porque hay muchos apoderados que no lo hacen porque no saben como hacerlo. Pienso que esa sería una de las cosas importantes, que se nos enseñe a nosotros a enseñar al resto de los apoderados y a los mismos niños directamente si no se puede con los apoderados."*[5]
>
> —PARENT, SCHOOL 1

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[3] Thanks to the financial support of the Bernard Van Leer Foundation.

[4] *"Honestly, I think we -at school- lack strategies or methodologies to respond to situations we face with parents. I know that teachers have some relationship to the parents, but I also think that something is missing from the part of teachers, maybe some strategies, I don't know, how to reach parents better, to break the barriers which impede parents relating to the school. And normally when mothers come, for example, because I call them, the mothers seem afraid, thinking what happened?, what did my child do?"*

[5] *"I think the theme is how to teach or help children at home. There are many parents who do not help them, because they don't know how. I think this is important, that we learn how to teach other parents, and how to teach children directly, if it is not possible to do so with the parents."*

Purposes of the *Educandos Juntos* Project

The *Educando Juntos* is an educational innovation. Its purpose is to develop a strategy of joint work between families and teachers of poor sectors, to positively influence the learning, personal and social development of children, during their early school years (from kindergarten to grade 2), when children are acquiring their basic reading and writing skills.

The specific objectives are:

- To encourage parents and teachers to identify themselves as key and complementary actors who mediate children's development and learning.
- To develop and/or improve parents' and teachers' abilities to stimulate children's development and support their learning process, through everyday life situations.
- To train parents and teachers, throughout a participatory learning process, so that they can act in a coordinated manner in the task of facilitating children's learning.

We began with two **basic, currently accepted assumptions**: ([6])

First, that parent involvement in their children's learning enhances their success at school; and

Second, that the discontinuities between home and school in the life of poor children may affect their learning process and school achievement as well as their social and emotional adaptation to the new environments they enter.

In particular we addressed and responded to the following previously diagnosed issues:

- The child in poor sectors experiences a lack of continuity and familiarity when s/he enters school, between the home and neighborhood and the school environment.

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[6] Susan McAllister Swap, *Parent Involvement and success for all children, what we know now*, IRE, 1990.

- The culture of popular families in Chile is principally oral. When the child enters school, s/he begins a transition towards a world in which the predominant language is written.

- In the school curriculum, the experience and culture of poor students and their families are not taken into account. Nevertheless, in order for the child to learn effectively, the school must build upon the knowledge and experience the child already has.

- The lack of communication, shared values, and goals between school and poor families easily leads teachers to blame the family for student's failure in learning to read and write.

- The need of the child is for significant adults (parents and teachers) to act intentionally as mediators of their development and learning, as understood by Lev Semionotich Vygotsky. Research shows that children who have better achievement in basic functions needed to learn how to read, write, and calculate are those who have had the help and support of their mothers in their pre-school years ([7]).

Our **hypothesis** is that if we increase and enrich the educational interactions between the school and poor families:

- parents will develop their potential as educators of their children

- teachers will appreciate the role of parents as educators of their children and will value family culture

- parents and teachers will learn how to work together, see each other as educators, and recognize that both have an important influence upon the child in a complementary way

- children will develop higher self-esteem and self-confidence, necessary for learning, as a result of richer interactions with the adults

- consequently, this will contribute to improving conditions that facilitate children's development and learning.

The *Educando Juntos* project could be classified under the Epstein typology as type 3, Involvement at school, and type 4, Involvement in learning activities at home.[8]

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[7] CIDE- Unicef, "Mejorando las oportunidades educativas de los niños que entran a la escuela", Taller Regional sobre la transición del niño, de la familia a la escuela. Santiago, Chile, 1992.

[8] Epstein, J.L., *School and Family Partnerships*, 1992.

Methodology

Methodological strategy

The methodological strategy of the project consists of:

- the design and implementation of training workshops with teachers and parent leaders ("monitores") representing each class from kindergarten to grade 2. [9]
- the design, preparation and validation of educational material and activities to use in parents' meetings and at home
- the observation, registration and systematic evaluation of participants' responses.

Methodological Approach

Educando Juntos defines its **methodology as active and participatory**. It involves methodological steps, which are applied both in the design of the program and in the strategies contained in the educational materials for the group processes.

Project design

Methodological criteria in the process of design. Some of the criteria we have identified in the design of educational materials and activities include:

- identifying the content and themes of the project, from the participants' experience and concerns
- approaching the themes with simplicity, in relation to the everyday language of the participants
- including drawings that complement the written word to facilitate the identification and expression of feelings and opinions

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[9] The "monitores" are parent leaders chosen in each class.

- attention to gender differences, using inclusive language both in its written and visual forms
- facilitating an active and participatory learning process, in a group atmosphere of trust and confidence
- presentating information, conceptual distinctions, and orientations related to child development that offer a common perspective for parents and teachers
- continuing observation and evaluation of learnings and difficulties, which offers feedback for the redesign of material and activities.

The methodological approach values participants' contributions on the basis of their own experience. People's comments were recorded in a participatory diagnosis at the beginning of the project.

This process has at least two benefits. First, the diagnosis itself is a learning process, where the participants can identify and reflect on their needs. Second, in time, the results of the diagnosis become "generative themes" that direct the design of the learning processes and materials on the basis of the needs and experiences of the participants.

One of the project's first activities was to identify the problems, concerns, strengths and educative needs realized in the diagnosis. Questions addressed the concerns related to family-school issues in children's crucial years of transition from pre-school to elementary school. The results of the diagnosis were organized and combined with previous diagnoses and observations in order to obtain **"generative themes."**

These themes provided the basis for the design of educational materials and activities to allow parents and teachers from Kindergarten to grade 2 to work together to support children's learning. The selection took into account priorities identified by participants as well as the aims of the project and the availability of resources and time for the project.

Group processes

A central element of the methodology involves combining workshops for teachers and parent leaders with the educational activities for other parents and teachers, at school and at home. In this way, participants experiment with the methodology during the workshop session, and later, they diffuse the educational activities reaching other parents and teachers in their school. In this way, they can compare the education process with their day-to-day practice.

Another important feature is a written evaluation, in simple form, of this process of implementing the educational materials and activities.

The educational materials are designed to encourage participants to go through the following steps:

a) Sharing of experiences. The educational process has as its starting point the needs, experiences, knowledge, beliefs, values and concerns of the participants. It allows teachers and parents to observe their own daily practices and their influence upon children's development and learning and share their experiences with others.

The sharing of personal experiences occurs if there is a mutual trust among participants. Basic trust is a condition for group process in social learning and action.

b) Interacting with others (social process). Each person's perspective is the starting point of the group process, but it does not end there. The social context in which the educational process occurs provides awareness of differences and similarities with others. The personal experience of parents in their role as educators, for example, is enriched in the interaction with others, and helps to enlarge each parent's point of view. Teachers' perspectives may differ from those of the parents, and both can enrich each other's knowledge of children.

At the same time, ideas based upon research on child learning and development are presented, to enrich the dialogue and inspire reflection. For example, the adults, both parents and teachers, might consider the mediating role they have in children's development.

c) Critical reflection. Encountering and considering different views allows each person to acquire a wider perspective on the issues and to become open to change when this is necessary. Participants, with the guidance of the coordinators, learn to make language distinctions when talking about children's education and child rearing practices. For example, it is necessary to differentiate between affirmations about a situation, opinions, and value judgements. A judgement on another's experience may inhibit that person's sharing and would be an obstacle for building trust among the group.

d) Consequent action. From the reflection developed, the participants, both parents and teachers, draw conclusions about their roles supporting their children's development and learning. They see the need to make decisions about personal and group actions at home and at school to support their children.

The commitments made are revised in the subsequent group session to draw new conclusions and further examine experiences.

The School Context

The Municipality of La Florida, where the two schools are located, is situated southeast of Metropolitan Santiago and borders the Andes Mountains. A review of the history of the area revealed that this was originally a rural area dedicated mainly to vineyards and the production of wine, and was owned by approximately ten families.

Urbanization began in La Florida in 1940. During the first stage, until 1958, the area was populated mainly by poor sector families. In the following stage, until 1967, a more middle class sector, including teachers and public employees, migrated to La Florida.

A third stage (1968-73) was characterized by increased urban construction subsidized by the State on behalf of poor sector families. During this period Villa O'Higgins was constructed; the Villa is one of the main areas where students of these schools now come from.

Villa O'Higgins is a sector that has one of the highest percentages of poor and extremely poor families in La Florida, mingled with working and middle class sectors:

> 33% of La Florida's total population is considered poor, and 8.2% is considered to be in extreme poverty.
>
> Between 25-50% of the student population of the two schools is considered poor. Up to 45% of the housing in the sectors where students live is

considered poor or inadequate. (Nevertheless, there are other areas in Santiago where poverty is greater than in La Florida).

Compared to other schools in the area, Municipal Schools[10] have the highest percentage of student failure (8%). About 27.59% of the children in La Florida do not attend school. (These data comes from the Ministry of Education, 1990, 1991)

Characteristics of Families from Kindergarten to Grade 2 in "School 1"[11]

The following data were collected through a questionnaire given by teachers of Kindergarten and grades 1, 2, and 3 in "School 1;" they administered the questions in parent meetings. All of the questions were addressed to parents or other adults who live and care for the students.

Age: 61.36% of the parents in Kindergarten are between 20 and 35 years old. In grade three, 40.18% of the parents are between 36 and 50 years old.

Schooling: 13.7% of parents have either no schooling or very little schooling (up to grade 4). This percentage is high for Chile, given the lower illiteracy rate here (5% according to 1994 data) compared to other Latin American countries.

Occupation: Most mothers classified themselves as housewives, with the exception of mothers in grade 2, where more than 40% work outside their home, many as domestic employees in middle class homes.

Many fathers find occasional employment in the informal sector of the economy; others are workers, some are technicians, public employees and merchants, and very few are professionals.

Number of children per family: Half of the families in Kindergarten and grade one have between one and two children, which is related to parents' younger ages. The number of children per family tends to increase in the later grades, to between three and eight children.

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[10] Municipal schools are public schools administered by the Municipalities through Educational Corporations. They receive a subsidy which is given according to student school attendance.

[11] To protect the confidentiality of the opinions of teachers and parents in the schools, we'll replace their names with a code. The school where we started the "Educando Juntos" project will be School 1 (S1), and the school where we continued the work afterwards, School 2 (S2).

Adults with whom students live:

70.60% of the students live with their father and mother, according to the families who responded to the questionnaire.

22.36% live with the mother only.

1.3% responded that the mother lives with another man ([12]).

5.11% of students live with other adults who are not their parents.

Implementation of the Project in Schools

We will now provide a summary of the actions and reflections from 1991 to 1994. Although we started our formal participation in the cross-national study only in 1992, the project *Educando Juntos* started in 1991, and many of its actions and findings prior to 1992 are particularly relevant to this study.

The 1991 phase

Educando Juntos started its work in "S1" school in July 1991. A first and initial stage extended from July to December 1991, in which ten teachers from kindergarten to second grade and twelve parent leaders, mostly mothers, participated.

The activities developed during 1991 were varied. Interviews of teachers and parent leaders were conducted in order to diagnose the problems children face during their early school years, to hear parents' and teachers' perceptions of family-school issues, and to gather suggestions to deal with difficulties in these educational interactions.

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[12] This percentage probably does not reflect reality, since in Chile it is not socially accepted that a mother declares she lives with another man. Teachers also perceive that this percentage is greater.

The group then addressed the design of educational materials and activities that respond to learning issues for children, on which parents and teachers may collaborate. The interviews had been conducted prior to the design of the educational materials and activities, and the parents' and teachers' concerns were then incorporated into their design.

Seven training workshops to provide the opportunity for parent leaders and teachers to experience personally the educational materials and activities were conducted, in order to include their suggestions for adapting materials to their situation. Sessions for parents and teachers were conducted separately.[13]

Several examples of educational materials and activities were introduced in parent's meetings, with the purpose of validating these with parents of each class from kindergarten to grade two.

Furthermore, we led a participatory evaluation of the methodology and materials and the projections of activities for 1992 in light of actual advances and difficulties.

The 1992 phase

Our purpose during the 1992 school year was to advance more steps in the methodological strategy that we were developing; to create more educational materials; and to realize the project in another school to obtain data to compare results between schools. We continued working in School 1 developing more workshop sessions and educational materials, and we initiated the project in School 2.

School 2 is located in the same geographic area, with similar social and economic characteristics. Its main difference is that School 1 also includes the high school level.

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[13] The reason for this separate workshop space for parents and teachers is related to the fact that "S1" teachers asked that since we were starting the work in the middle of the school year, they could only do new activities maintaining the meeting space they already had, which was a teachers meeting on Tuesday mornings. This was their space, so it was not feasible to get together with the parents at this meeting time.

The main activities involved:

- Designing new educational materials and validating the ones developed in 1991, to be used within workshop sessions and in parent meetings.

- Eight monthly training workshops in each school. It is important to note that the different workshop pattern in each school had a different impact in the interactions between teachers and parents:

    - In S1, workshops for teachers and parents continued apart as in the previous year, and
    - in S2, we set the condition that parent leaders and teachers should be trained together as "teams" within the same workshop sessions.

- Application of eight materials and activities within monthly parent meetings (one theme a month).

- A day-long session at the end of the year with parent leaders, teachers and the school principal, in order to conduct a participatory evaluation with the purpose of gathering suggestions for how each school could continue the program independently in 1993.

The 1993 phase

During 1993 there was a considerable increase in activity in the schools of the *Educando Juntos* project. The work included seventy-five parent leaders and teachers representing nine schools in the Municipality of La Florida. Of these, seven are new schools and the other two continued from previous years. All have similar socioeconomic conditions.

This extension was planned in the original design of the project, and it was possible because the positive evaluation of the first two pilot schools motivated the desire and interest of others to participate in the project. Also, the completion of the publication of educational materials in March 1993 facilitated their dissemination and transfer.[14]

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[14] We published 12 "Carpetas" (folders) which contain educational materials and activities to work with families in school meetings and at home. Each folder contains sufficient materials to form six small groups at the classroom level during parent meetings.

There were eight monthly workshop sessions and an all-day evaluation and planning meeting in November.

The level of our intervention changed also, from a direct approach, with training teams at the classroom level (home-room teacher and two parent leaders), to an indirect one, where we trained teams at the school level. These teams included three home teachers (representing Kindergarten and grades 1 and 2) accompanied by six parents from the same classes and one or two other professionals from the directive or technical team of each school.

After the workshop, each **School Team**, as part of their pedagogical training, had a month to implement the transferral of the educational materials to the other teachers and parents of the parallel classes. After this training, each **Classroom Team** applied the theme/material within the regular monthly parents' meeting.

3. The Multi-National Study

Antecedents

It is important at this point to clarify a few details. First, the invitation to participate in the Multi-National Study initiated by IRE occurred when the *Educando Juntos* project had already started its intervention. Second, the *Educando Juntos* project is not a research project, but an intervention which includes, however, elements of participatory research. The results of evaluations are used for action, to inform the design or to get feedback from the application of educational materials.

Recognizing these factors, we decided to adapt and combine the instruments and methodological approach suggested by IRE with the approach and instruments used by the project.

We submitted a proposal in May 1992, in which we defined the general purpose of the study and objectives for the 1992 school year. Later, during 1993 and 1994, the research focus was modified to take into consideration the implementation of the *Educando Juntos* project. Initially we intended to look at one school only (School 1) to identify changes in parents' and teachers' perceptions, communication, and ability to respond together to issues related to child development and learning, as a result of the project.

Because we were working in a number of schools, it was difficult to concentrate on only one school. Our experience gave us an opportunity to compare elements and factors between schools that may play an important role in the greater or lesser success of the innovation. Therefore, we decided to include both School 1 and School 2 in the case study.

To reiterate, our intended goal was to carry out a study of the strategy and educational activities between family and school implemented during 1992 and 1993, by the *Educando Juntos* project, at two Schools in La Florida, Santiago, Chile.

Specific Questions

- What did parents and teachers (from Kindergarten, grade 1, and grade 2) have to say about the family-school relationship, when we first arrived at the first school? What were their mutual expectations?

- What were the methodological features of the innovation involved in the *Educando Juntos* project?

- How did perceptions change, and what kind of joint actions were initiated to support children's development and learning as a result of the project?

- How were educational innovations appropriated by the two schools? What were the common elements and differences between the two schools?

- What were the Ministry of Education's policies related to family-school issues? Do these facilitate or promote school actions towards the family, or do they tend to hinder them? Have there been any changes in recent years?

Methodological Approach

The participants. *The main researcher*, Bernardita Icaza, coordinated the research, participated in the realization of activities of the project, and assumed the responsibility for the systematization and writing it in English.

Bernardita Icaza, Liliana Mayorga and Alexis Arellano, the professionals forming the *Educando Juntos* project team,[15] were previously responsible for carrying out the broader project. Once the case study began, the team contributed to the design and implementation of educational activities, and the reflection and systematization of the work done.

The school principals and counsellor supported and made possible the implementation of the project in each school; they provided relevant information and reflections about the school history and the advancement of the project; and they provided educational leadership.

Family-school teams at the school level and classroom level were trained in workshops during the school year. The teams were composed of homeroom teachers and parents, and were responsible for implementing the project activities in those classes that participated in the project and providing evaluative reflections on the results of their activities, by responding to a written form. (See the "Pauta de Observación" among the instruments used.)

Instruments Used

The instruments used in the study include the following:

Diagnostic interviews

These interviews were conducted in 1991, with the purpose of diagnosing parents' and teachers' perceptions before starting the educational intervention.

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[15] We also have had the invaluable collaboration of two italian co-operants Alice Mulasso and Paolo Nagni, for 2 years, and Jim Morin from CIDE.

Interviews with parents and teachers in School 2

In 1993, interviews of parents and teachers in School 2 were conducted after the first year of the *Educando Juntos* project. Questions were similar to those of the diagnostic interviews.

Questionnaires for parents in both schools

Questionnaires for parents were designed in 1992, related to their economic and social situation and schooling.

The IRE Instruments

The Parent Form, the Teacher Form, and the School Climate Form provided by IRE were used in October 1992 in School 1.

Interviews of students in School 1

A group interview with students was designed and used in three classrooms (grade 1, 2, and 3) at the end of 1992.

Interviews with School principals and the counselor

In 1992 the principals of the two schools and the counselor of School 2 were interviewed.

Non-structured conversations

Since 1991, we conducted several non-structured conversations with key persons at the two schools: the principals, counsellors, teachers, and parents.

Self-observation Forms ("Pautas de Observación")

These forms were used to observe and register elements present in parents' meetings when applying educational material from the project.

Action Research Process

From its origins, CIDE's Family-School projects have been designed with a foundation of participatory process. The presence and writings of Paulo Freire in Chile in the sixties and the development of "Educación Popular" (Popular Education) during the years of the military government influenced our collaborative and social approach both in the design of the projects and in its methodological process.

Later, the contact with Action Research approaches in North America, both "Participatory Research" in Canada and IRE's "Parent Teacher Action Research" in Boston, enriched and expanded the possibilities of our practice and reflections.

We recognize the presence of action research principles in our Family-School projects. Nevertheless, we only partially implemented IRE's model of "Parent Teacher Action Research:"

- The participants (parents and teachers) were fully part of the diagnostic interviews, and their comments influenced the project design;

- Participant experience is the starting point of the methodological approach to promote group reflection and action;

- Even though parents and teachers participated in the activities of the *Educando Juntos* project as a whole, they did not conduct the case study research;

- Selection of educational themes from the participants' responses during the design of the project was done by CIDE's team;

- CIDE's professionals studied and evaluated the results of the intervention and used the results to design educational material.

4. Data Analysis, Outcomes, Discussion

Diagnostic Interviews: The Voices of Parents and Teachers

In August 1991, ten teachers from kindergarten to second grade and twelve parent leaders, mostly mothers, were interviewed at School 1 before starting the educational intervention. The interviews aimed to diagnose parents' and teachers' perceptions regarding problems children face during their early school years, the educational interaction between the family and the school, and their suggestions for solving existing difficulties in these educational interactions.

The questions more relevant to the relationship between family and school were synthesized in a paper and presented in August 1994 at the seminar we organized, "Encuentro Familia, Escuela y Aprendizaje."[16] Here, we present the main opinions of the teachers and parents interviewed. Their responses offer a sample of the perceptions and mutual expectations of teachers and families in poor sector schools in our country.

The Opinions of Teachers

Teachers' perceptions and judgments of the families of their school

Teachers expressed concern because fewer and fewer students in poor sectors seem to have stable families responsible for them. In many cases a young brother or sister, another relative or a neighbor comes to school when a teacher calls a child's family. Teachers feel that many students are "abandoned;" kids come to school several hours before classes start because they do not have a place to stay, since nobody is at home. Teachers feel that this reality affects children's development profoundly, and neither the schools nor the Government acknowledges the problem. For example, neither institution has offered after-school programs for these children.

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[16] The papers presented in that seminar were published in August 1994: Icaza, Bernardita y Mayorga, Liliana, editoras, *Encuentro Familia, Jardín Infantil, Escuela y Aprendizaje*, CIDE, Santiago, Chile, 1994.

Furthermore, teachers say that the support of the family is indispensable in order for children to achieve educational and social goals. They have very precise expectations related to this support, and if a family does not respond to them, teachers assume the family "does not care" for their children. They expect a family to support children in their responsibilities as students; Such support includes:

- sending them to school on time and everyday;
- sending them with materials (pencil, notebook, text books, etc.);
- sending them clean and preventing or curing health problems like hair lice;
- assuring that they do their homework, reviewing and signing their notebooks every day;
- reinforcing at home what is taught at school: habits, language, reading, writing and math

If a child does not respond adequately with these needs addressed, the family (or more precisely, the mother) would be responsible. Children mirror their families.

Teachers also state that parents should be concerned for the academic achievement of their children. They expect parents to be in contact with teachers, to read written communications, to go to parents' meetings, and to send explanations when they cannot attend.

Teachers expect parents to attend parent meetings regularly. In Chile, pre-schools and schools organize parents' meetings, once a month or every two or three months. Teachers indicate that this may be the only occasion to comment upon children's learning and behavior and school norms. They expect both parents to attend, but this is rarely possible, either because there are many single-parent families, or because work schedules or the presence of babies or young children at home prevent them from coming.

A child's low achievement at school is seen as an indicator of a lack of concern on the part of the family. Teachers expect parents to support their children emotionally, to converse with them, to express love, care, and recognition for their work, and to give positive reinforcement and not use physical punishment.

Finally, parents should teach values to their children, and should not confuse them, for example, by lying, when the school teaches them not to. Teachers are also concerned about the "bad example" and the confusion children experience when they do not live in stable situations (they mention, for example, the presence of lovers).

Difficulties in encounters between schools and families

Teachers identify the following factors as difficulties which impede the organization of collaborative activities between schools and families:

- low attendance at parents' meetings at the classroom level
- mothers' lack of time, related to their jobs, or because they have to take care of small children at home
- the hours parents are called to school, either for parents' meetings or for interviews, are not convenient for parents
- parents' assistance at meetings, participation and interest is greater in Kindergarten and decreases notably as children grow.

A teacher in an administrative role expressed that teachers themselves lack motivation to work with parents. The possible reasons for this resistance are varied. Teachers lack strategies or methodologies to work with parents. A barrier also exists between teachers and parents. As a result, when parents are called to school, they come with fear, wondering "what might have happened with my child?"

Teachers are also often disappointed with parents: years ago, one teacher said, "We were [an] authority for parents; we called them to talk and they came to school; now, they do not respond to us." Some teachers mistrust parents because they "accuse" or blame teachers, in conversations with the principal, when problems between them emerge.

The Opinions of Parents

Parents' perceptions of their participation at school

Parents interviewed say that they feel invited to participate in a variety of activities initiated by the school, including the school anniversary celebration, fund raising activities, athletic competitions, and the cleaning and painting of classrooms.

They recognize regular and occasional opportunities to encounter teachers. These opportunities include the parents' monthly meeting, conferences when teachers call them for specific reasons, and daily encounters when they bring or pick up their child from school.

They perceive that some teachers, especially in the Kindergarten, encourage them to inquire regularly about their child's behavior and achievement. Other teachers, mostly grade 1 and higher, are viewed as being less accessible, having a more structured schedule to meet with parents.

Parents say teachers expect that they support their children at home to reinforce learning activities (some teachers expect this, while others prefer that parents do not intervene, because they say this may confuse the child); to check children's notebooks, support children in their homework, and sign the notebooks once children have their homework done; and to teach and reinforce habits related to social behavior, cleanliness, and work habits.

Difficulties for the encounters between school and families

Parents interviewed indicate several reasons parents do not participate actively in the education of their children.

Work schedules and the care of other small children at home impede parents' ability to attend when the schools invite them. Occasionally, in a single-parent family, or when both parents work, children stay with a relative or a neighbor.

Parents reported that some parents do not take responsibility for their children's education, leaving the task of education to schools; they simply would not be interested or concerned in their children's education. Other parents do not know how to help their children, or lack formal education themselves to be able to help. Still others feel ashamed to go to school, because they are afraid the teachers will talk about their children's problems.

Finally, financial problems also make participation difficult; some parents do not have enough money to cooperate in parents' meetings.[17] Some parents also question the lack of clarity regarding the use of money raised among them, because of unfulfilled promises on the part of the Parents' Organization of the school.

Reflections

Teachers express clearly that they require the support of the family to educate their students. This support includes social, emotional, academic and moral aspects. They expect the family to reinforce what is being taught at school.

Nevertheless, there is not only one perspective among teachers. Within the diversity, some teachers seem very open to working with parents, while others seem more reluctant. Factors like age, years in service and the kind of professional education they had seem to influence teachers' attitudes.

Teachers' opinions are divided regarding their expectations in terms of parental support. They say it is indispensable for the success of the educational process, and at the same time they express being bothered because of the limitations that make supporting children especially difficult for poor families.

We believe that the school and each teacher need to specify their expectations more and express them clearly among themselves and to parents. It is also important that they maintain a dialogue with families so that families discuss their own opportunities to respond to the school's demands. We have to consider that in Chile the subsidy given to poor schools only partially covers the expenses needed to function, and that poor families can afford only a small part of the school materials required. Consequently, even though education is "free" for the poor, there are still many material demands, precisely for the families who cannot afford them.

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[17] In our country, is traditional that in parents' meetings there is a moment to raise money among parents, for different actions, like painting the school, repairing washrooms, buying a blackboard, etc. Subsidy money in poor schools is not enough for all the needs that schools have, and parents are expected to complement it. There is a sort of social pressure to cooperate economically.

Collaborative discussions about the needs and expectations of both teachers and parents require both adequate space and time. A very concrete possibility is to recover the opportunities from traditional parents' meetings, but they require important transformations from "vertical" methodologies to more "horizontal" ones.

Generally the school and its teachers have strong opinions with respect to the "lack of parents' participation." We missed, however, in most of these opinions, a more serious consideration of the real reasons parents have for not "participating" in terms defined by the school. In this sense, we think parent teacher action research would be a useful tool to open dialogue and create coordinated action between families and schools. It would help to discover the realities behind the misunderstandings, and would expand the sensibilities of both parents and teachers.

Most schools do not offer attractive opportunities for parental participation, and some parents and teachers resist participatory forms of conducting parents' meetings. It takes time and confidence for parents to address their own needs and concerns, to believe that their perspectives are valuable, and to accept the idea of other parents (leaders) conducting the meetings with teachers. We also see an urgent need to find more specific ways to communicate with the "hard to reach parents" -- precisely because they are not reached in parent meetings -- to address issues related to children's learning and development.

It is a positive sign that some teachers and directors recognize their limitations in working with families and seek new possibilities to work in a collaborative way with families.

IRE's Study Instruments

Adaptation Process

At the beginning of 1992, we did an initial literal translation of the instruments sent by IRE. Then we were faced with the challenge of adapting them to our national culture and to the culture of the popular sector. For example, telephone communication between teachers and parents was mentioned in the Parent Form; in the Chilean popular sector there are few public telephones and even fewer private telephones. Nevertheless, we tried to keep all of the items on the forms in order to not make major changes in the original instrument.

Other obstacles existed as well. First, the requirement of applying a pre-test proved impossible, because we received the instruments six months after we began working in "S1" school. Second, since we had declared in 1992 that our study was going to be done only in School 1 we did not think of using the forms in School 2, which would have allowed an interesting comparison of the responses from the two schools.

Given all of the limitations, we decided to use the forms to examine how the issues presented in the different items were addressed by the teachers and parent leaders with whom we were working. We applied the Parent Form, the Teacher Form, and the School Climate Form in October 1992 in School 1.

Application and analysis of the Parent Form

Ten parent leaders were interviewed, all women, in October 1992. Our three-person team conducted the interviews, following the guidelines of the parent form. Nine were mothers of students, and one a grandmother. They all have between one and two children, with the exception of the grandmother, who is in charge of five grandchildren in the school. Their children are in basic school classes; one of them also has a youth in the secondary level.

Five of the mothers had completed schooling through grade 4, grade 6 or grade 8. The other five achieved secondary school levels. Family monthly income ranged from $45,000 (about $110 US dollars) to $400,000 (about $1000 US dollars). In Chilean culture, questions related to income are very delicate. Experience shows that persons interviewed tend to report lower incomes -- so that schools will not ask them for contributions -- or increase the real figures in order to impress the interviewer.

It was obvious by their responses that they were very conscious of parent-school issues. This awareness does not necessarily reflect the reality of the majority of parents, since mothers who participate in the project as parent leaders are generally more aware of the roles expected for both parents and teachers.

During the interview process, we realized that many of the questions were not understood or were misunderstood particularly by parents, because of their different cultural context. For example:

- It is not typical for parents and teachers in the popular sector to talk about common goals. Parents seemed perplexed with the question. Nevertheless, the question poses an interesting possibility for parents to think about.

- With respect to questions regarding interactions with their children's teachers, or with the school, we observe a tendency to agree with teachers and the school. Parents are not accustomed to expressing disagreement with teachers, so the majority tend to respond cautiously or to please. Popular sectors in Chile highly value school, teachers, and education for their children. So it is difficult to have a critical attitude toward education, or to find negative aspects related to the quality of the education their children receive. Research findings in Chile also show that parents do not make demands about the quality of education. We found it significant, though, that in another question two persons dared to doubt if the homeroom teacher had the preparation and knowledge to teach her child.

- In another question, mothers declared that they feel comfortable discussing their expectations, concerns, discipline approaches, and other issues with teachers. We think that their practice as parent leaders may have influenced their responses. But there is disagreement if there would be opportunities for parents to make decisions with teachers about the education of their children.

- In Chile it is not common practice to call parents individually to inform them about their children's progress. Individual contact occurs when the child has a problem or an accident occurs. Telephone contact between teachers and parents is very rare even in the middle class where families have telephones. In popular areas there are not enough public telephones for the population, and even fewer exist in their homes.

The more typical means of contact between school and home are parent class meetings, personal conversations with parents in special cases, written notes, and informal conversations.

Parent class meetings occur once every two or three months. Each homeroom teacher calls all of the parents of her class. Traditionally, she is the one who prepares the meeting agenda and directs the meeting, informing parents about student progress and difficulties (in a general way); she also asks parents for help, or complains about some issues. In the end, she passes control of the meeting to the representatives of the parent organization in the class, so that they can inform parents and organize their activities.

Teachers call for personal conversations or interviews with parents of a child. As was said before, this tends to occur when there are problems or emergencies. Ideally, teachers would call their students' families just to get to know them, but what we see in reality is that teachers lack the time to do so. Teachers also send written notes home. Most of the time, the notes refer to problems a child is having.

Informal conversations occur at school when parents bring their children to school and when they pick them up. This practice is very common in kindergarten classes. Many parents, mostly mothers, bring their children to school, and teachers provide opportunities for brief conversations where they exchange news about the children.

Parents in some way rejected questions referring to "children's problems." They stated that their children do not have problems, or that their children had "just a small vision difficulty." It seems that parents have difficulties in recognizing and accepting the possibility that their children have problems. We believe that the word "problem" is very strong in school discourse, and that it has a strong negative connotation, because it blames parents for the problems of their children. We suggest the hypothesis that mothers and fathers in Chile are proud of "not having problems;" having problems is not seen, for example, as a challenge to grow. We remember the words of a mother years ago; she said, "We want to ask teachers not to accuse us, but that they converse with us, and help us when our children have problems."

Other questions referred to interactions between parents and children at home. Most of the mothers feel they do a good job helping their children both with learning activities at home, and making sure their children have good nutrition and proper clothing. They also feel that they need to know or learn specific ways to help their children at home. They say they ask their child about school and that they help them with homework three to six times a week; some help more than seven times. We interpreted this response with consideration of the fact that they are leaders and that they had been "monitoras" of the CIDE program for a year and a half.

Parents also discussed the things teachers do that have had a positive influence on their children's performance at school. According to the parents, teachers give attention to the children and are attentive to the problems they may have at home. Teachers have the needed skills and abilities: they talk to the children, give them affective responses, listen and understand them; they do not discriminate among their students. Teachers also congratulate and encourage the children. Parents also mentioned the teachers' dedication and their particular ways of teaching. They liked the fact that some teachers do not let any child stay behind, give special attention to children who have problems, and relate to the children as people.

Other parents stated that they do not see any positive influence of the teachers on their children. One mother believed her daughter was exactly the same as she was at the beginning of the year. Another indicated that her child has problems of hyperkinesis and believes the teacher rejects the child; another teacher apparently tells the mother that the girl is selfish (because the mother tells her daughter that it is difficult to share when you do not have much).

Parents also discussed things they do that have had a positive influence on their children's performance in school:

- Enforcing study time; being attentive to their education; having dedication toward children; helping them organize their schedules.
- Telling them stories and quizzes; teaching them names, colors; explaining homework; playing with them.
- Motivating and supporting them; congratulating them for their achievements; treating them well and calmly and not treating them badly; not getting anxious with them; relating to them with care; saying "thank you for getting a good mark."
- Giving them time.
- For fathers especially, talking with the children.
- Coming to meetings and contributing what is needed for the activities planned.
- Buying things for them; looking for materials needed to complete their homework projects.
- Being close to school, and the teacher; talking with the teacher and participating in CIDE activities.

Interviews of Students in School 1

A group interview with students was designed and implemented in three classrooms (grades 1, 2, and 3) at the end of 1992. The interviews were designed to be applied by their homeroom teacher, so children would feel comfortable with the interview. Teachers in School 1 applied them in November and December of 1992.[18]

The items were:

- Importance of school for them.
- Help and support from their homes.
- Descriptions of and feelings about the attention they receive from parents and teachers.
- Indications of when they feel appreciated at school and at home.
- Reasons why teachers call their parents to meetings, and children's expectations of them.

Significant observations

To the questions related to the importance of school for them, children gave answers including "to study," "to get education," "to be a good mother," "to be more intelligent."

Most children say they get help doing their homework and preparing their school bag. Other children say they do everything by themselves, and that they like to do so.

They feel parents and/or teachers pay attention to them when they get good marks, when they behave, and when they misbehave (like when they are fighting). They also mention attention received when the teacher asks them to get something, when there is an accident, or when they don't get to class on time.

Children feel appreciated at school when somebody lends them a pencil, helps them in their homework, and when they get good marks. If they were to ask their teachers for something, they would ask them for good marks and for help with their work. Also, some children say they would like teachers to "understand their writing."

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[18] Again, we regret that we did not interview students from School 2, because it would have been very interesting to compare.

Most of them say they feel appreciated at home. If they were to ask something of their parents, they would ask for love, caring, peace, and respect ("as I respect them"); to be well treated; and that parents teach them to behave and to do homework.

In response to questions related to the "reasons why the teacher calls their parents to parents' meetings" and "if they like that their parents attend those meetings," they say that parents' meetings are to tell parents about children's behavior and marks and to "accuse" them when they do not behave at school. By their responses, we suspect that there are no changes in their perceptions of the traditional parents' meetings; we would have expected to see a change, because their parents have been attending different types of meetings for a year.

Interviews and Conversations with School 1 and School 2 Principals, and the Counselor in School 2

We had conducted several conversations with key persons in the two schools, the principals of both schools, and the counsellor of School 2 since 1991. Some were more formal interviews, and others were informal conversations.

The items covered by the **interviews** were:

- Professional profile of those interviewed
- School profile and brief history of the school
- Strengths and challenges of the school
- Needs to which the *Educando Juntos* project responded
- Appreciation of the work the project has done in the school
- Personal views of factors where school can help Kindergarten to grade 2 students succeed
- Factors where the family can help these students to succeed
- How teachers from Kindergarten and the first school years are selected

Non-structured conversations

Several non-structured conversations were conducted with key persons in the two schools. They aimed to identify changes and more subtle elements in the process of applying the project in the schools.

We will summarize the most significant issues raised.

School 1

Interview of M.P., Principal of School 1

M.P. has been the principal of the school since 1990, and has worked for seventeen years as a teacher. He has a degree as an Elementary School Teacher and has completed other specialization courses, including one in administration. Before becoming the school principal, he worked in the school as a teacher for five years. He was the first principal the school had after the re-establishment of a democratic government.

The school has courses from Kindergarten to grade 12, and this year it has 1350 students. He describes the school as being in a stage of transformation, breaking out of the inertia experienced before. There is a desire to innovate, to get involved more profoundly in the technical and pedagogical problems, and then, from there, to project a new school that responds efficiently to the challenges that the community puts to it.

The more urgent problems and challenges are related to improving the quality of education. For example, they have been working to raise their results on the SIMCE test in elementary education.[19] In 1992 they increased their results from 54% to 68%, and they are planning to maintain those results, or raise them again, given the systematic effort they have put toward that goal.

At the secondary school level, the reality they faced was that most of the students who finished grade 12 did not get into University, nor could they find work. So the school created a Technical-Professional degree to prepare students to get a technical diploma when they finish schooling. This preparation would allow them to work as electricians or dress makers.

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[19] SIMCE is a national test that measures the achievements of students in language and math at the end of grade 4.

The school has a significant number of projects which range from planting trees in the school yard (badly needed during the summer), to the Technical Diploma. Among the variety of projects, the Family-School strategy introduced by CIDE was inserted. M.P. feels that this initiative came as "ring to finger,"[20] since the teachers and he had been talking about the need to work with families to improve the quality of education. They indicated that they needed support in developing methodologies for working with adults.

This same variety of projects, though, meant at times that teachers have felt overwhelmed by so many demands. In a conversation in 1992, M.P. mentioned the need to define a school project which would give meaning and coordination to the diversity of efforts they were undertaking through the numerous projects they had.

He feels positive about the school today; he says that the school has a leadership role in La Florida Municipality compared to other schools that are living by routine.

Insertion and consolidation of the Family-School Strategy

The history of the *Educando Juntos* project is a long one in School 1; nevertheless, today there are no apparent signs that the strategy proposed was ever consolidated.

The outside intervention of CIDE developed in different stages for three years. During 1991 and 1992 the CIDE team had a direct presence in the school. We went there for the initial interviews and the workshop sessions with parents and teachers. M.P. expressed that the work done directly with them and the support of CIDE had been very important for the teachers.

In 1993, since the goal of the *Educando Juntos* project was to transfer the strategy to a broader group of participants, the relationship between the CIDE team and the nine schools we worked in was more indirect, through a school team of three to seven teachers and parents participating in the monthly workshops.

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[20] This is a free translation of the Spanish expression "como anillo al dedo," meaning that it fits perfectly.

The response of the School 1 team in terms of implementation of the work at the school grew weaker, and we could see less enthusiasm compared to the other participating schools. It is important to note, also, that they experienced a number of changes and problems that year, and a few teachers suffered substantial personal and family crises.

At the end of 1993, we organized a final workshop with all of the participating schools, with the purpose of enabling schools to design a Family-School project to develop during 1994, in preparation for continuing the family-school work in a more autonomous way. We already knew that the *Educando Juntos* project did not have external funding for 1994, so unless the Municipality provided funding to support the process of consolidating the strategy, the school teams would be on their own for the 1994 year.

During 1994, the school did not plan activities related to the family-school strategy at school. M.P. reported that they were too busy and also hoped that the CIDE team would have more presence at school that year. He expressed that although the *Educando Juntos* project had achieved important successes in their school, the strategy was not consolidated in a way that would be appropriated by the teachers. Change of mentality is a long process, he added.

Given elements of the experience in School 1 already described, an examination of the experience in School 2 allows us to compare results and suggest some explanatory hypotheses for the processes.

School 2

M.M., Counselor of School 2

M.M. has been a counsellor in the school for twenty-two years. She has twenty-eight years of experience as teacher and counsellor.

The school has courses from Kindergarten to grade 8, and is located in the same area as School 1 in a popular sector of La Florida Municipality. The central characteristic of the school, she says, is the unity, and the great identification and commitment of everyone -- teachers, students and families. The parents of most students were students themselves in the school. Families have been involved in many activities to make the school grow or improve.

The socio-cultural and economic reality of families is very deprived. Nevertheless, M.M. says, they are always surprised at the leadership that grows in some of them, if you support them and make them aware of their role in the education of their children.

Their challenge is to increase the students' self-esteem, which is related to violent situations in the community. The school responds to this challenge with programs in alcohol and drug prevention. Sexual Education is another important need. The school is organizing a program using educational materials from the *Educando Juntos* project, to be implemented during 1994.

Their students also need school materials, lunches, and medical attention. They are always organizing to obtain these resources from government or private sources.

They are in the process of defining their School Educational Project, centered in values and the integral education of the students.

M.M. is a key person in the school. She has been at the school since it started; she says she loves her work and "she is in love with education" too. From our experience, she appears to have a central leadership role.

M.M. declares that she is fascinated with the *Educando Juntos* project that CIDE initiated at the school. She states that although they have always been working with the community, the project addressed the need to grow closer to the families. It allowed the school to bring in parents in a more systematic way, and to sensitize them to their educative task. The collaborative work between parents and teachers can help also to improve the cultural and social quality of life of the families.

What the project fails to do, she adds, is to reach students and families up to grade 8, since the students between grade 5 and grade 8 are the most in need; there are many problems and conflicts at these levels. Consequent with this need, she promoted an adaptation of the project in the school, and today they apply the family-school strategy in all grades.

During 1994 M.M. continued coordinating the family-school strategy in her school, in an autonomous way. Since April, they have been implementing the Family-School project they defined for their school at the end of 1993, from Kindergarten to grade 8. Every month, teachers and parent leaders get together for a workshop session, experience the methodological steps contained in the educational material, and prepare the sessions for introducing the materials in the parents' meetings of each class.

M.M. believes that there is a unique enthusiasm and commitment among the teachers and parents. She also recognizes that at times it is hard to motivate some teachers.

The manner in which they have organized the work plan is in some sense very similar to the way the CIDE team worked with schools during 1993. In another sense, they have adapted and changed the *Educando Juntos* project to their needs and reality.

We will reflect more about learnings of the two schools' experiences in section 6.

5. Parent Participation and the Ministry of Education Policies

Concern for parents in our country began many decades ago, and its origins are linked to movements that have a religious character.[21] For a number of years, the Ministry of Education has also shown an interest in promoting parent participation on the basis of their role as educators. Two main structures, "Schools for Parents" and "Parent Centers," (e.g., parent associations) have thus been legitimated by the educational system and also implemented to some degree in many Chilean schools.

In reviewing the policies from the Ministry of Education that regulate the participation of parents in the school, two kinds of norms are distinguishable: norms oriented to regulate the work with parents within the school, which appears in Ministry documents since 1979; and norms and orientations about the family in actual government programs to improve the quality of education.

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[21] Like the Movimiento Familiar Cristiano and the Instituto Carlos Casanueva.

Ministry Policies and Programs

Schools for Parents ("Escuelas para Padres")

Schools for Parents have existed in some Chilean schools since 1959. The concept was taken originally from France. However it was not until 1979 that a mandate [22] from the Ministry of Education provided explicit instructions to schools to initiate Schools for Parents with the following objectives: a) to help parents to address the education of their children responsibly and efficiently, and b) to collaborate with parents in the integral education of their children.

Schools for Parents should function outside the school's regular schedule and the principal is responsible for assigning a teacher to be in charge. Weekly 45-minute sessions for a two month period are suggested. The designated teacher and the president of the Parents' Organization should be in charge of planning themes.

The policy suggests that schools ask teachers and other specialists in the community to be resource persons on a volunteer basis. An active methodology and the use of audio-visual aids are recommended in order to avoid more traditional presentations.

Parents' Organization ("Centro de Padres")

Parents' Organizations have been active in Chilean schools for decades. But it was not until 1981 that they were legalized. In 1981, Parent Centers obtained their legal identity (Law No. 18.057). They are defined as organisms with the exclusive purpose of collaborating with the educational and social function of the schools of which they are a part. In 1990, under decree No. 565, the Ministry of Education approved a General Ruling for Parent Centers, which applies to all schools recognized by the Ministry of Education.

One of its principles declares that education should stimulate the convergence of the educational influences of both home and school and open channels of communication that enrich the relationship between both. Among its objective and functions are: a) To establish and support links between home and school, in order to facilitate the understanding and support of school activities on the part of the family; b) to help parents, as well, to exercise their role in strengthening habits, ideals, values and attitudes that education promotes in students; and c) to support the educational task of schools, contributing with efforts and resources to promote the integral development of students.

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[22] Ministry of Education, Circular No. 855, 1979.

Plan for the Integration of the Family into the Educational Process

In 1988 the Ministry provided instructions for schools to integrate families into the schools' educational processes.[23] The project defined two programs: a) **Sexual Education** for students, and b) **Educational Cooperation between Home and School**, addressed to parents. This latter has as its objectives:

- to facilitate communication and interchange of knowledge and experiences between home and school to complement and enrich their educational task;
- to value and recognize family experiences and skills that favor the development of children's affective and social abilities;
- to support parents to be aware of and accept their parental responsibilities and rights;
- to support the development of parent groups in each class, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and opinions among parents; and
- to contribute to the formation and development of an educational community which would create conditions to facilitate the students' harmonic development.

This program is to be applied by the homeroom teacher in each class, outside the school schedule, with a methodology similar to the one suggested for the Schools for Parents.

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[23] "Plan de Integración de la Familia al Proceso Educativo". Ministry of Education's mandate to integrate the family in the educational process. Circular No. 4071, 1988.

The Current Programs of the Ministry of Education

There are two programs and an educational policy which mention the family. First, a Program for the 900 poorest schools benefits, through teacher training and materials, ten percent of the poorest schools in Chile. This program promotes the participation of families in one of its activities: Learning Workshops ("Talleres de Aprendizaje [TAP])." These workshops are designed to help students with learning difficulties. Parents are encouraged to participate in some of its activities.

Second, there is the Program to Improve Educational Quality and Equity. It assigns resources for the improvement of the quality and equity of education at the pre-school, basic, and secondary school levels. At the pre-school level it defines the need to assist children and their families within the rural sector.

Finally, the Ministry established a policy regarding the participation of the family in sexual education programs for parents and schools. It dates back to 1968, when a Family Life and Sexual Education Program ("Vida Familiar y Educación Sexual") was developed by a department of the Ministry of Education. In this program, families were first consulted in a diagnosis and later taken into account in the planning of educational activities in order that they be prepared to direct their children's sexual education. This initiative was discontinued in the early 1970's.

In 1991, the Ministry of Education formed a committee, in which we participated, to elaborate recommendations for a national policy on sexual education. One of the central themes the committee agreed upon with was the recognition of families as the first educators in all areas of their children's education and especially in sexual education. The policy recommends that for schools to undertake sexual education, they need to consult, inform and involve parents in the educational activities proposed.

Parents' Meetings

Parents' Meetings ("Reuniones de Padres y Apoderados") have been for decades the most regular form of participation for the majority of parents in schools. These are meetings planned and called by the school and home teachers, with the purpose of informing parents about issues regarding their children's education. Usually there is time in the agenda so the representatives of the Parent Center in each class can give information and organize parent activities. Parents' meetings, depending on the school, are held monthly or every two to three months.

The documents previously revised only show what is available in terms of written norms or orientations. Parents' meetings are a practice of participation of the family in schools that do not appear in the revised documents.

Analysis of Documents

An analysis of Ministry of Education documents regarding parental participation and parents' role in education leads us to conclude that the norms show a history of interest in parents on the part of the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, in most schools policy and practice do not coincide. There are a variety of reasons which explain this situation.

In many schools principals have tended to ignore norms regarding parental participation because of a lack of inclination and limited human and material resources. In schools where "Parents' Organizations" function, the kind and quality of their activities and orientation depend on the group of parents who direct them, the resources they have, and the support they receive from the school principal and teachers. Frequently, their main function is to raise needed funds for the school. In relation to this function, though, there has been mistrust in some schools between the majority of parents and the group directing the Parents' Organization. This directing group sometimes lacks competencies in administration, lacks money, or does not communicate properly with the rest of the parents, losing credibility.

At other times, there have been political problems, where the directing group or the principal are not able to solve political differences between parents creatively.

It is expected that the President of the Parent Center participate in the planning of themes and in the organization of proposed activities in the "Schools for Parents." In the majority of cases, teachers select them according to school needs, limiting the direct participation of parents. In programming, the tendency has been to cover general themes, losing the specific issues that interest parents in relation to the developmental stage of their children. In addition, few teachers are prepared in adult education and active educational methodologies to facilitate parental participation. To attend "Schools for Parents" also means additional meetings and therefore additional costs.

We can see that the Government programs have in their design a stipulation that encourages schools to involve families in their educational projects. But this idea is still in its initial stage, and the tendency has been to give priority to teacher training and to cover basic material resources that schools need in order to respond to the teaching and learning process. The issue of involving parents in their children's learning at school has been left to the initiative of each school.

There are signs, however, that indicate an openness to put family-school principles into practice. One cause for hope is the increasing interest on the part of some school principals to promote democratic participation that includes the whole educational community -- teachers, students, and their families -- in the discussion and definition of the schools' Educative Projects. In a broader context, the requirements of the modernization and democratization of Chilean education, recently defined by the National Committee for the Modernization of Education,[24] address the participation of a variety of sectors in society and particularly targets parents.

A New Program Regarding the Family-School Approach

Recently there has been an important shift at the Ministry of Education regarding a Family-School approach. During 1994, the Ministry signed a contract with CIDE, through the aforementioned MECE program, for an ambitious two-year program of designing and implementing a "strategy for articulation." Articulation, in this context, means exchanges, agreements and links among the variety of educational institutions and levels children go through between four and eight years old (pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, grade 1 and grade 2), and between these educational institutions and the children's families. For this purpose, our experience with the family-school methodology is being coordinated with experiences in teacher training for language development and math.

We have designed a training program for pre-school, grade 1, and grade 2 teachers, parent leaders of the same classes, pre-school teacher-aides, and school directors and supervisors of forty-five schools and pre-school institutions in poor urban areas of Santiago. The purpose is to improve the learning conditions for children of those ages, in the areas of language development, reading and math, with the participation of the family. We are training them in participatory methodologies and forming teams of educators and parents who will transfer the educational activities to other parents and teachers in their own settings (schools and pre-school levels) with the help of their principals and supervisors.

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[24] Comisión Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación, december 1994.

This experience will be transferred and disseminated at the national level in 1995 and 1996, through a television correspondence course. The program will be seen by thousands of teachers and families during 1995. We are designing a "Teleduc" program[25] in collaboration with the Catholic University of Santiago.

6. Findings and Lessons of the Experience

Results

We have been able to verify that the relationship between the family and the school is a true concern among principals, teachers and parents. There is a need to work with the families of students, but at the same time school professionals lack preparation for working with families.

There is a positive apreciation for the participatory methodology and materials, since they stimulate adult learning. The methodology enables parents and teachers to integrate their own experiences into the learning process.

The methodology and educational materials have been well received by teachers and parents in the school. They say that through the training process, the methodology becomes familiar, and the materials become very helpful tools for working with parents.

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[25] TELEDUC, Televión Educativa, Universidad Católica de Chile, is an educational TV program, realized by the Catholic University of Santiago, at the national level.

With respect to the experience during the workshop sessions, teachers say they are impressed by the capacity of the parent leaders to reflect and to suggest solutions for the problems that the educational community faces.

The exchanges between parents and teachers result in more trust and mutual appraisal. Teachers say that the work with parents gives them a rich opportunity to get to know their students' families. Parents express their appreciation for teachers in their personal and professional dimensions. Better communication between parents and teachers then helps to improve communication between the adults (parents and teachers) and children. This improvement positively influences children's dispositions for learning.

The educational activities help parents and teachers to gain an increasing awareness of their roles mediating their children's affective and cognitive areas. Those dynamics that lead the adults to remember their own difficulties when they start school help the adults to "[put] themselves in their children's shoes," therefore becoming more sensitive to and understanding of them.

Parents and teachers start to see themselves as co-educators: they see the need to look for common criteria in relationship to children's parenting and education, and, at the same time, the need to identify the responsibilities of each in the education of children.

The school team formed during the training workshops, composed of teachers, directors and parents, becomes a "generative team" that animates and gives leadership to innovative actions between school and family.

Both teachers and parents say they experience an important personal and professional growth first during the training process and afterward in the activities they implement at the school. Also, they say that the positive effects of the program reach their own families.

Lessons

Differences between School 1 and School 2 in the process of appropriating the strategy of the *Educando Juntos* project

Some of the differences between the two schools which started to appear very early in the process of implementation of the project may be explained by the influence of several factors. First, School 1 was the school in which we initiated the *Educando Juntos* project as a pilot experience in 1991. So the relationship between the CIDE team and the school staff, particularly the teachers, changed over the course of three years from a direct relationship, with in-depth interviews, regular visiting and reflection, to a more indirect one.

Second, the expectations of the schools and the CIDE team were very different; we expected that School 1 would gradually appropriate the program, adapting and changing what was needed and gaining autonomy after two years. However, they expected the close presence of the CIDE team to continue. As the school principal stated, *Educando Juntos* did not consolidate into the practice of teachers.

Third, our experience from the years when we started Family-School work demonstrated the need to prepare parent leaders and teachers in the same workshop session rather than apart. Since there are often mutual fears and confusion about their responsibilities, the educational process in collaborative work helps to influence their mutual acceptance; teachers accept and value parental participation as educators of their children within the school, and parents get to know and appreciate teachers' work with their children.

In School 1 we compromised and adapted to existing conditions which meant running two separate workshops, one for teachers and another for parent leaders. At the end of 1992, we invited teachers to mingle with the parent leaders, for a final all-day session outside the school to conduct a participatory evaluation of the completed work. Many teachers complained and refused to go to the session, arguing that they only meet parents where and when it has been defined that teachers meet parents (in parents' meetings at school). These teachers were later challenged by others who went to the session.

For us, this confirmed the fact that the understanding and commitment between teachers and parents is greater when they develop a relationship of mutual trust during the workshop sessions. Teachers have fears, either openly expressed or more subtle, that the boundaries related to their different role would be surpassed. Some teachers in School 1 have had experiences of being "accused," in conversations with the principal or higher educational authorities, by parents who do not confront them directly with whatever problem they have. That kind of past experience influences older teachers in School 1 and we have seen similar negative influences among many other teachers in the Chilean school system.

Therefore, we can conclude that it is necessary during workshop sessions to build a process that helps to clarify the roles, mutual expectations, and channels of communication. Most parents and teachers need help developing communication abilities.

In contrast, we have seen a more autonomous process developing in *School 2*. We think that the leadership of M.M., the school counsellor, has had an important influence. She appropriated the Family-School strategy because she saw it responded to their educational goals and values. As she mentioned, for an innovation to become autonomous in the school, there is the need for a person to animate it and coordinate it, offering committed leadership to the rest of the teachers and parents. We have seen that M.M. has done just that.

Leadership roles

The role of the facilitator is another important issue. In our case, either the whole *Educando Juntos* professional team or one member was regularly involved with parents and teachers during the years when the project was being implemented in schools. Once the facilitator leaves the school, the school needs one person to assume this kind of role. This is not always easy, though, because of the school professionals' lack of time, and/or because people in the schools (principals, teachers, and parents) need and expect support from the external institution.

In School 2, the leadership role assumed by the counselor was central for the development of the project and its continuity after CIDE's team leaves. In School 1 there were many staff changes; every year a key person had to leave. For example, there was a different counselor every year; also, one of the teachers who was an enthusistic animator of the program left the school.

Our experience still shows that although a school may be more advanced in terms of continuing the implemention of a project, one or two years after the facilitators leave people feel they need some support from an external professional. According to a recent external evaluation,[26] this was also the case in *School 2*.

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[26] Malva Villalón y Rodrigo Uribe, "Evaluación del Proyecto Educando Juntos", Santiago, enero de 1995.

Schools' and teachers' commitment to educational innovations

In Chile, schools are actually invited to participate in a variety of programs, both extra-curricular, to complement the regular programs, and programs that aim to improve the regular school curriculum. In either case, in-service teacher training is required. Chilean teachers themselves are constantly concerned with economic problems, since salaries are insufficient to cover their family budgets; as a result, they have difficulties with added professional demands.

Another problem related to this phenomenon is a tradition of norms imposed on schools by the Ministry of Education. Although this pattern has changed, most principals are not accustomed to having a more critical attitude towards the variety of programs in which schools are invited to participate.

This panorama adds complexity to the already pressured school life in Chile and adds many challenges for the introduction of educational innovation. One requirement is that an innovation respond to needs felt by the school staff, the families and the broader community. But this is not enough. Outside researchers and animators should incorporate into the operation of introducing a new program a process that facilitates the addition of the new proposals to the context and specificities of already-existing programs.

We think that regular practice of action research among all of the educational agents of the school could be of considerable help for the successful introduction and implementation of new programs and projects. Principals, parents, counselors and teachers should be part of a learning process where they can define very clear steps to a) regularly "read" their situation and investigate it, b) plan the actions required for responding to the challenges it presents to them, and c) evaluate their response, using the results to enrich action.

An innovative program like the *Educando Juntos* project, which has been designed in a participatory process in which the participants have been heard, is a step ahead. Nevertheless, participants tend to "miss the point," not seeing the "meaning" of the actions and their relationship to their situation. Once the program is more defined and begins to make more systematic requirements, teachers tend to become detached.

We have observed that some younger teachers are relatively more open to trying an innovative method for working with parents than older teachers are. Nevertheless, teachers themselves have observed that more than age, what provides an open attitude toward working with parents and the community would be the type of professional formation they have had. In Chile, from 1842 to 1974, one important institution for the formation of elementary school teachers was the "Escuela Normal."[27] One of its central characteristics was that it trained future teachers so that they would be prepared to offer an integral education to their students, in which the relationship with the students' families and the community was an important element. Also, this education school was highly selective, in terms of professional vocation of the applicants, and teachers educated in this system tend to be very committed to their work.

We believe that what influences the attitudes and behaviors of teachers toward parents would be a combination of factors like age, personal stage, self-esteem, professional education and professional development and salary (whether it is adequate for her/his needs). In Chile it is also important to consider the neighbourhood where they work and live. In many cases, if the area where the teacher works and/or lives is considered dangerous, it will be very difficult to do extra work with parents.

A Final Word

The combined work of CIDE's educational intervention, along with IRE's Multi-National Study, provided an occasion to draw the interest of other professionals to the area of Family-School partnership in the country.

This interest has developed in three related areas:

1. In the development of educational projects and programs between Family and Schools
2. In the development of educational and social policies at the level of the Ministry of education
3. In academics who are interested in researching in the field

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[27] In 1989, 36% of the elementary school teachers in Chile were formed in the "Escuela Normal". In discussion paper by Cristián Cox and Jacqueline Gysling, "La formación del Profesorado: saber e instituciones", Santiago, CIDE, 1989.

An example of the last category is the number of academics who presented papers in the seminar "Familia, Escuela y Aprendizaje" which we organized in August 1993.

Finally, the links with IRE and the network of professionals has permitted us to situate the theme on an international level, which has the effect of further underlining the importance of it and giving credibility to those of us working in the field.

The kind of changes in family-school relationships that we are proposing need time. But we need to be actively "reading" the situation and getting the feedback needed to keep building proposals that are meaningful to the participants.

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Chapter 8

PERSPECTIVES ACROSS SEVEN CASE STUDIES

By Vivian Johnson and Don Davies

The first section of this chapter was written primarily by Vivian Johnson, Co-Principal Investigator. She highlights two issues in discussing the cases and their results: 1) teacher and parent reluctance to develop partnerships; and 2) intercultural factors in the development of partnerships. The final section (Conclusions and Recommendations) was written by both authors.

Collaboration with families and communities is encouraged by national, provincial, and/or local policies in all of the countries in which these case studies were conducted. Despite policy support, however, certain behavior patterns consistently emerged that created and/or sustained barriers to partnership.

Parent-Teacher Reluctance to Cross Boundaries

All of the studies revealed the constraints of tradition in teacher-parent relationships. Traditionally, educators have thought of parents' appropriate role as that of strong, mostly silent supporters of schooling. Expected to assist with homework, encourage children to work hard in school, and sign and return forms quickly, parents were not wanted in schools except on invitation to open house, to pick up report cards, or to assist with raising money. Other requests for parents' presence at school usually meant that a child was in trouble, academically or socially (Johnson, 1993, p. 1).

With this tradition overwhelming transactions between parents and teachers, it is no wonder that in their case study, Silva and Vieira describe the new parental role at Pinhal do Rei School in Portugal as "a new world unfolding." Despite the potential for providing continuity between home and school inherent in this new world, previous experience makes some parents reluctant to pursue school-family partnerships actively. The major theme that emerged from the case studies was the consistency of parents' and teachers' reluctance to develop collaborative or partnership relationships. There was usually a wariness between the two groups. Even when one group decided to reach out to the other, there was often great uncertainty about how to proceed. Lack of experience in collaboration was a basic fact for nearly all participants in these cases, and some reluctance to cross established boundaries of home and school appeared in all the cases.

For both parents and teachers, behavior reported in the case studies seems to indicate similar causes for this reluctance: 1) the force of traditional beliefs, 2) fear of the unknown, and 3) lack of knowledge of how parents might become involved in schools.

The Force of Traditional Beliefs

The idea that school is the proper domain of teachers and that parents should not cross the boundaries into that domain is a strong traditional belief that creates barriers to parental involvement. As Marques notes in Chapter 3:

> ..some parents believe that they should not meddle too much in school matters. It seems that some parents have delegated to the school a great deal of their educational responsibility as a result of the division of functions they perceive between the school and the family.

The Center's framework theory of overlapping spheres is not yet often realized in practice. Throughout the cases, the force of this traditional belief is illustrated by parental reluctance to become involved because it was not the proper thing to do. Silva and Vieira report:

> It is natural that the majority of them (parents) regard with skepticism the invitation for their involvement in school affairs since, in their recollection, parents went to the school only when they were summoned, if there were discipline problems with their children.

Teachers demonstrated their reluctance by expressing both their sense of the proper dimensions of their teaching role, including time limits, and their notions about the appropriate relationship they should maintain -- one in which parents support school from a safe distance at home. Silva and Vieira quote one teacher as saying: "I'll mind your children here, and you at home." And Icaza notes, "Teachers have fears, either openly expressed or more subtle, that the boundaries related to their different role would be surpassed." Villas-

Boas also points out: "The main reason to prevent the further involvement of teachers is their strong belief both in their traditional role 'inside' the classroom and the 'limits' of their schedule."

In her case study in Prague, Walterová summarizes common teacher responses to change:

> Teachers guard their traditional values, professional autonomy, personal authority and proved practices. Any change seems endangering to their previous position. Their resistance is a consequence of recent social and professional experience. The changing concepts of education and schooling have not reached most teachers. They have not accepted the new, broader model of the teachers' profession. They see themselves as mediators of cognition in special branches (math, science, history, etc.) and do not accept the role of social mediators. The outreach depends heavily on teachers' willingness and readiness to accept changes.

Schools' Outreach and Parents' In-reach

There is general agreement among the case study researchers that schools are in the more powerful position and therefore should reach out to parents with creative initiatives that will overcome the reluctance of shy, fearful, or hesitant parents. The cases describe a wide range of such initiatives, including home visits, Open Door Days, after-school programs, a family center, telephone outreach, excursions, action-research, and informal social gatherings. In all the cases, many enthusiastic parents, teachers, and students participated in these activities and demonstrated that successful collaboration benefits students, teachers, families, and schools.

In each site, however some parents were reluctant to participate because of fear of schools, lack of knowledge, or traditional beliefs. And, some teachers resisted these activities whenever they felt the activity crossed boundaries into their domain and especially when the activity required them to do something that was not compulsory within the present educational structure. This was true even if the teachers agreed that the activity seemed to improve school climate, home-school relationships, or children's school performance. Resistant teachers were those who had a strong sense of the limits of the dimensions of their profession; they would state that the activity requested was not their job. This was especially true in the case of activities outside the school, such as home visits, as shown in the Walterová and Villas-Boas studies. However, within the school, some teachers refused to participate in activities that they felt added more time or additional duties to their traditional work. This included serving on the action-research team in Marques' study, providing workshops for parents in Villas-Boas'study, and attending extra meetings with parents in Icaza's and Martínez González' cases.

Understanding Teachers' Reluctance

Teacher resistance was a major finding across these multi-national studies. So common was this theme that in our discussions at a gathering of all the case study researchers, Don Davies reflected on this similar experience regarding the teachers': "There is a commonness of teacher behavior across national boundaries in relationship to parents, to communities, to time, to work, to their role, and in their feelings of low status."

A recent OECD (1995) study indicates that teachers and their profession are highly respected in some countries included in this study (Portugal and Spain). Despite this evidence, in the case studies in those countries, some teachers continue to reflect feelings of low status and to resist parental involvement in schools.

We must conclude that the problem of teachers' reluctance to involve parents is not simply a problem of teachers' concern that there is a low level of respect for the teaching profession and that people want to interfere with their work because they don't respect teachers as professionals. Other factors must influence this attitude. However, it is difficult to determine what these factors are as there is no common multi-national training of teachers, nor common textbooks used in different countries. In addition, there is diversity among teachers in the profession in terms of backgrounds and beliefs. It is clear that those teachers who do reach out to parents, as illustrated by these research studies, are at the forefront of their profession, and their strategies should be shared with other professionals.

One factor that certainly influences teachers' attitudes regarding outreach to parents is the presence or absence of administrative support. In those schools where principals provide the time, and acknowledge and reward teachers for engaging in outreach activities, teachers are more likely to collaborate with families and communities.

Teacher Professionalism: Constructing 'Normality'

Another dimension of this issue was offered by Stephen Stoer, who served as an adviser at the cross-site conference for researchers. He noted that parents would not in fact expect to be involved in the domain of other professionals such a doctors, lawyers, or engineers. Stoer believes that the difference is that other professionals work on things that are "not normal, or a-normal," while teachers are involved in "constructing normality" and parents are part of the same process. Therefore, school-family partnership makes sense because each institution is working toward the healthy development of individuals in a long-range process. Families are not usually involved with doctors, lawyers, or engineers in a process that takes ten to twelve years. That would be abnormal. But the process of educating a child in the formal education process takes that long and therefore home-school partnership strengthens the construction of that normality.

Parent Fears and Lack of Confidence

While teachers may resist outreach because of fear of parental encroachment into their domain, many parents are reluctant to cross the boundary into schools because they fear schools, either because of their negative school experiences or a lack of confidence due to their own limited formal education. These parents may have what Toomey calls "...an irrational awe of teachers' professional competence...." Icaza's case study supports this point:

> Parents are not accustomed to expressing disagreement with teachers, so the majority tend to respond cautiously or to please. Popular sectors in Chile highly value school, teachers and education for their children. So it is difficult to have a critical attitude toward education, or to find negative aspects related to the quality of the education their children receive.

She also notes the reluctance to participate caused by parents' fear, shame, and lack of formal education. Similar experiences are noted in all the case studies. Toomey concludes: "...those parents who do not readily visit the school may cut themselves off from this advice because of their uncertainty and lack of confidence or lack of awareness of the value of their help to their children even though they are usually very concerned about their children's success in school." He also notes that in the cases where parents have poor English skills, they "will usually conceal this from the school and the very low self-esteem which usually accompanies low literacy.... [T]hese parents will not approach the school because they are afraid that their low literacy will be detected and this will harm their children."

Such fears may result in parents cutting themselves off from the opportunity to learn about ways to become involved in their children's education, so they don't receive training when it is offered, as Toomey points out. This point is underscored in Villas-Boas' study. Were home visitors not involved in the literacy study she conducted, it is unlikely that parents would have participated in the home learning activities, because they were reluctant to go to school. She reports:

> Although at first, families were not very enthusiastic about being visited, the success of the home-visiting program must be emphasized. Without the mediators who visited the children regularly and showed emotion and respect to them, parents wouldn't have come to school so willingly, and the successful implementation of their involvement in their children's literacy development might not have been achieved.

Parents may lack knowledge of how to participate in schools because they have cut themselves off from pursuing the information. Another reason for parents' lack of knowledge of how participation in their children's schools might work is noted by Walterová as "...an underdeveloped mechanism of participatory educational policy and a lack of experience...." Therefore, "many parents were waiting for school initiatives." According to Icaza's findings, for some parents, school is either a mystery or a frightening place:

> Other parents do not know how to help their children, or lack formal education themselves to be able to help. Still others feel ashamed to go to school, because they are afraid the teachers will talk about their children's problems.

Intercultural Relationships

Relationships in these case studies represent intercultural boundary crossings. The differences in the orientation, interests, beliefs and actions between teachers and parents illustrate the dynamics of cross-cultural factors at work. Culture in this case is both the classic definition of "a way of perceiving, believing, evaluating and behaving" (Goodenough, 1987, quoted in Gollnick and Chinn, 1994, p.4) and a more specific definition relating to the dynamic interactions seen in these studies. Silva and Vieira provide this focus:

> The concept of culture is used here to suggest the pattern of meaningful organization *in terms of representations* and symbols, resulting from varied social circumstances and constructions among which are social origin and the different interactions to which each individual from each group is exposed. The focus of such an approach is to gain knowledge of the cultural and professional identity of each actor: Who are the parents? Who are the teachers? What is the Parents' Association? What is the dynamic resulting from the interaction between these cultures which meet sometimes in solidarity, other times juxtaposed, and, in other instances, with friction?

The friction is sometimes indicated by signs of mutual distrust between teachers and parents. Some parents fear school participation because they are concerned about being blamed by teachers for the student's low achievement. As Icaza points out, " A child's low achievement at school is seen as an indicator of a lack of concern on the part of the family." Icaza says that other parents are concerned with contradictory messages from teachers.

> Parents say teachers expect that they support their children at home to reinforce learning activities. (Some teachers expect this, while others prefer that parents do not intervene, because they say this may confuse the child.)

Teachers may blame parents for not responding to school communications, which they interpret as a lack of responsibility. Teachers may not trust parents because they have experienced some parents' misuse of their power in making unwarranted accusations or in blaming teachers generally when they talk to the principal.

Role Differences

Signs of mutual mistrust between parents and teachers may indicate role differences. Teachers are concerned with working with a group of children, while each parent is concerned with the progress of his/her own child. This role difference may account for the contrasts in parents' and teachers' perceptions of opportunities to meet shown in the case study in Spain. Martínez González reports:

> More teachers than parents think they come together "frequently" to discuss educational objectives, to make decisions, and to make plans to solve problems. In all of these cases, teachers tend to feel they are providing parents with enough opportunities to talk and to solve problems together. Some teachers insist that parents should come to school more often to meet with them.

She goes on to say: "However, parents do not have the same perceptions as teachers about the opportunities they have to meet." She then gives the following quote from a parent's response to the questionnaire: "If we do not ask teachers to meet with them, we do not see them. Parents are the ones who always ask to meet." Another parent is quoted as saying: "I am the one who always contacts them when I observe something is wrong with my child, because I want to know whether they have the same perception."

Observing that parents' priorities are not always easy for teachers to meet, Martínez González concludes by pointing out that:

> Despite the needs described, it can be said that parents, in general, have a positive attitude towards teachers and the school.

She further notes that one very positive result of the action-research project was an Open Doors Day, a new activity in which parents were invited to come to the school to see how the school works and view students' work. The outcome was improved communication among parents, teachers and students.

Social Class Differences

In addition to role distinctions between teachers and parents, there may also be social class differences. Martínez González reports that many teachers were of the same social class as parents in the school and many lived in the school community. However, social class differences were found in other case study schools. In discussing their case, Silva and Vieira describe the background of parents most likely to participate in schools as follows: "...a smaller group of parents came forward, by virtue of being closer to the school's thought and practice, to form the Parents' Association."

Being "closer to the school's thought and practice" also seems to imply greater use of written versus spoken language, since Silva and Vieira also note the predominance of oral cultural among parents. Icaza also points to a similarity in Chile, saying, "The culture of popular families in Chile is principally oral. When the child enters school, s/he begins a transition towards a world in which the predominant language is written."

Silva and Vieira also note some surprises across class lines regarding the woman who became the leader to the Parents' Association.

> Paradoxically, this mother didn't seem to be particularly qualified according to her educational background. She is a housewife and the wife of a bank clerk. However, among her friends were teachers and other people with bachelor's degrees. She became involved in the Parents' Association from the very start.

This parent is particularly noteworthy within the discussion of cultural differences between parents, teachers, and researcher-interventionists. She is the ideal liaison among these different cultural groups.

> Different from the majority of the teachers, this mother knows the community well: She knows most of the families, she has played a rich mediating role between parents and school, and the communication and instruction of the children has benefited from her capacity for motivation, empathy, and interpretation. In fact, she is like a tribe elder who knows the local processes of enculturation and socialization, and knows how to filter the school culture, sometimes abstract and anomalous, to the children. She helps others avoid the conflict that exists between the different knowledge, culture and language that school and local community have.

Later, the researchers note that this woman was able to assist a gypsy boy in improving his performance in math because "...she is knowledgeable of the context which supports the child's understanding."

Teachers-as-Parents

Silva and Vieira also note another cultural component in the multicultural mixture that influences relationships in the development of home-school collaboration. That component is: "...the significant presence of teachers in the Parent Associations." Pointing out that this phenomenon has not been studied in Portugal, they raise significant issues relative to the dual role.

> Another interesting aspect that was salient in our study is the fact...that the relationship between teachers and parent associations is essentially a relationship between elementary teachers and high school teachers, respectively. On one level, they are both education professionals. But, on another level, the two groups have different training and possess distinct academic degrees with historically different professional paths that have been translated to different social prestige.

Given the conflict between the Parents' Association and the teachers in the case study school, Silva and Vieira's questions raise issues that should be the focus of later study regarding the impact of social class distinctions on home-school collaboration.

> To what degree does the composition of the Parents' Association facilitate the quick and growing autonomy of the Parents' Association from the faculty? Would the relationship have been the same if there weren't teachers in the Parents' Association? What if the parent-teachers would have been, uniformly or primarily, also teachers of the same grades as the school teachers?

The Need to Define Terms in Cross-Cultural Interaction

Another perspective on the complexities involved in crossing intercultural boundaries to build partnerships among teachers, parents, and researchers is offered by Stoer regarding the issue of definition of terms:

> In addition, the concept of partnership, which has indeed become part of the jargon of international organizations and which finds its predominant meaning very much attached to socio-economic models identified, above all, with the Anglo-Saxon world, is mobilized generally throughout the studies as if its meaning not only was known, but was also immediately applicable in all the countries covered by the studies. Here, the Portuguese case - home to three of the studies- is illustrative, for partnership as a formal term - in Portuguese designated "partenariado" -- has appeared mainly via social and economic programmes sponsored by the European Union. However, partnership as informal work among persons/entities with the same aims and common interests, as part of social roots at the local level, is conveyed by the Portuguese term "parceria." In order to "build stronger home-school-community partnerships" in Portugal, certainly both usages not only need to be taken into account, but also interrelated in a dynamic fashion. (unpublished section of Chapter 2)

Facilitator-Interventionists: Another Cultural Component

The Facilitator-Researchers were outsiders who intervened in the schools to promote family-school partnership and in doing so they crossed important boundaries. Their role proved to be important for the implementation of the project. In most cases the schools welcomed and enjoyed the existence of a "friendly visitor," who often provided services of benefit to the school such as offering referrals to agencies or individuals, giving information about educational opportunities, brokering other collaborations with the facilitator's institution, offering advice on pedagogical or administrative problems, and bringing materials from the Center and IRE.

Given the power of traditional relationships and the complexity of cultural differences between parents and teachers, implementing programs of home-school partnership is very challenging, and most schools are unlikely to attempt these types of programs on their own. The availability of the facilitator as interventionist is noteworthy, because in each case that person provided the inspiration and support needed by school staff and parents to make changes. The work was critical because the process of developing or expanding home-school connections is a difficult, complex nurturing process -- not a one time event.

The facilitator also brings an additional cultural component into the multicultural mix of parents, teachers, principals, and teachers-as-parents. As outside interventionists, facilitators enter the schools with particular approaches to the achievement of the goal of developing and sustaining family-school partnership. All these facilitators were from academic or research institutions or organizations and their focus was on an action-research approach which requires a special type of project format, elaboration, and analysis. The use of a questionnaire is a cultural artifact of researchers that was received differently in each setting. In Martínez González' case, the questionnaire itself served as a vehicle for discussion and a useful means of raising issues, concerns, and questions for parents and teachers. It was a foreign cultural artifact in the Silva-Vieira case. But as researchers from within the culture in which they worked, they "...caught a train already in motion (in regard to the existence of activities turned to the family)... (and) possibly helped maintain and expand the dynamics already present." By the second year of the project, however, there was an indication of cultural differences between the outside interventionists, who wanted the train to continue in the same direction, and the new faculty, who wanted to change its direction. "The school, paradoxically, seemed to move away from the goals of family involvement that we, as researchers, had sponsored."

Icaza also mentions differences between the facilitators and the school in the case study in Chile:

> ...the expectations of the schools and CIDE team were very different; we expected that School 1 would gradually appropriate the program, adapting and changing what was needed and gaining autonomy after two years. However, they expected the close presence of the CIDE team to continue. As the school principal stated: *Educando Juntos* did not consolidate into the practice of teachers.

Differences in expectations that result in dependence on the facilitator are noted by Martínez González:

> Expectations about the facilitator were also very high. Because the project was introduced by a qualified person who came from outside the school and who worked with them, parents and teachers tended to see me as the person responsible for its success, and they became dependent on me. It was necessary to explain what action research means in order to avoid this view. It was also essential to help parents, teachers, and students realize that the success of the project depended especially on them, as they were its real performers.

Most of the outside researchers or facilitators reported personal satisfaction and professional benefit from having a different and more positive relationship with school practitioners, a relationship where feelings of status difference between a university professor and a school teacher were lessened because of opportunities to talk and work on a personal basis.

They hoped and worked to encourage insider ownership of the interventions which were introduced. However, the level of ownership varied from case to case. Toomey regarded his approach as an external intervention which "...while at variance with the model of 'organizational renewal'" proposed for schools, was none the less necessary, "given the demoralized state of the teaching force and the lack of resources for the labor-intensive program of home visits." Therefore his approach was "...to consult with teachers but to try to avoid making any demands on their time."

While the ultimate success of the project depends on insiders, achieving family-school partnership is difficult and sometimes frightening. There is no normal time in school schedules to pursue this goal and neither teachers nor principals are usually trained for it. As Marques has pointed out, facilitators provide training, information, guidance coordination and support. Therefore, dependence on outside facilitators is not surprising, given the barriers to family-school partnership that are discussed regarding these cases.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The barriers to partnership are indeed substantial. These include:

1. *lack of pre-service or in-service preparation for teachers and administrators about collaboration with families and communities;*
2. *lack of preparation for families about collaboration with schools;*
3. *lack of structures or mechanisms for informal communication (social gatherings, festivals, holiday events);*
4. *infrequent communication regarding questions, issues, or concerns focusing on mutual goals;*
5. *lack of special attention to strategies to involve "hard-to-reach" parents (low income, poorly-literate, culturally different); and*
6. *unwillingness or inability to confront cultural differences within the school (e.g., family differences of race, ethnicity, social class; teacher differences: elementary-secondary, younger-older).*

In addition, two persistent problems created additional barriers to home-school-community partnership:

1. *common use of negative communication between the school and the home (parents are called when children are in trouble); and*
2. *participation in governance councils that is often limited to a few "knowing" or "elite" parents.*

Although the barriers cited above create or maintain boundaries between home and school that are difficult to cross, the case studies show that the multi-cultural mix of parents, teachers, principals, and researcher-facilitators can provide an intercultural process that produces positive outcomes. However, the question of sustaining and expanding these outcomes must be raised because the force of traditional attitudes combined with the power of different cultural orientations between families and schools is unlikely to motivate people to develop and sustain family-school partnership without external support that is continuous and secure. Therefore, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Teacher Preparation

In none of the cases was there an indication that teachers or other educators had any specific focus on collaboration with family and community in their pre-service preparation nor has there been much, if any, attention to developing knowledge and skill through staff development.

We recommend that teacher preparation programs add preparation for collaboration with family/community to curricula, and that school officials include this area in staff development.

2. Parent Information

Parents also usually lack knowledge and preparation for becoming partners with schools. Several of the projects included workshops and other activities to fill this gap.

We recommend that schools interested in developing family and community collaboration provide parents and other families with opportunities to learn which are carefully attuned to the participants' needs, interests, and culture.

3. Resources: Time, Space, Money, Facilitation

In most of the projects, lack of resources was cited as a serious barrier: not enough time, not enough money, unexpected or unplanned cuts in outside funding, and/or changing government policies that undercut the school's partnership activities.

We recommend that:

- ***time be allocated in each school for planning and implementation of home-school-partnership activities.***
- ***space be provided for family centers to encourage teacher-parent meetings, informal school activities, and parent information sessions.***
- ***funds be available for each school to develop home-school partnership activities. Funding should be available for staffing, equipment, and materials, and for facilitation by educators and parents who have demonstrated leadership in this area, and/or by outside facilitators.***
- ***universities and teacher preparation colleges approach schools to propose collaborative projects, offering faculty and students time for assistance.***

4. Policy Support

Some of the researchers advocated change in government policies to allocate funding for partnership activities in the schools. In all of the countries there are recent state, provincial, or national policies which in one way or another encourage school collaboration with families and/or communities. Not often were these laws cited as having strong impact on the work in the schools. However, the laws were "enabling," because they provided a positive policy context for the initiation of the family-school projects. Mind-sets, attitudes, and traditions are often beyond the easy reach of government policies.

Several of the researchers commented on the difficulties of spreading the work in their school to other schools in their region or country. Few plans for "scaling up" were identified but several of the project participants recommended efforts to do this. One positive example is in Chile, where the Ministry of Education has engaged the research center (CIDE) that organized the project for this multi-national study to carry out parent education programs in other schools.

Policy Review Boards, if their titles and approach were carefully geared to local cultures, could help to develop and sustain administrative support for home-school partnership. Such boards could suggest, for example, that partnership be included in teachers' and principals' professional evaluations and that resources -- including money and the time of outside facilitators -- be allocated to schools wishing to initiate programs of collaboration.

We recommend the establishment of policy review boards at national and local levels to evaluate and promote progress in parent-teacher implementation of home-school partnership policies.

5. Administrative Support

Formal government policies provide an enabling context. However, our studies have shown that informal policies, implemented by principals, have more potent effects on school activities (Davies, Burch, and Johnson, 1992). By emphasizing certain policies, principals have a dominant role in setting school objectives. Therefore, when principals stress the importance of family-school partnership, as shown in some of the cases, schools are more likely to promote such partnerships.

Similarly, principals' support of teachers who are leaders in home-school collaboration also sends a positive message regarding its importance in the school. Principals who provide the time, and who reward teacher outreach to parents through phone calls, notes, and home visits are likely to have more teachers engaging in these activities. When teachers who are leaders in developing creative outreach are given opportunities to share their strategies at general staff development meetings, the value of home-school collaboration is acknowledged within the profession.

We recommend recognition and support of teacher-leaders in home-school collaboration through public acknowledgement and whatever incentives are available according to local or national laws.

6. Action Teams

In most of the four sites where a team approach was employed, the process was felt to have been useful for better communication and more positive relationships between parents and teachers. Some of the researchers concluded that the school team was also an effective mechanism for planning and school problem solving. Walterová suggests that the team approach is an important example of democracy in action.

In the action research project in the USA, the parent-teacher action research teams often proved to be useful devices for doing studies of significance to local participants and for bringing together the teachers, parents, and administrators for a common, mutually-beneficial task (Palanki and Burch 1995).

We recommend that action teams be tested as a useful model in schools interested in improving teacher-family relationships and doing collaborative planning to increase home-school-community collaboration.

7. Reaching the Hardest to Reach

A major concern in the project in Australia was the difficulty of reaching the parents in greatest need of assistance. The researcher uncovered evidence of the reticence of the "hardest-to-reach" parents to participate in parent involvement activities and recommended new methods of recruitment and encouragement to overcome their reticence. If, as it seems apparent in this project and possibly in some of the others, the parent involvement activities are benefiting the academic development of the children of participating parents, the children of the "hardest-to-reach" families who are not being reached at all may be further disadvantaged. Some of the other researchers shared this concern about the most reticent parents but believed that the interventions were somewhat effective in overcoming this problem. The Australian researcher advocates using community-based adult education providers to reach the most reticent parents.

We recommend that schools seeking to improve family-school partnerships pay careful attention to who is being reached, and design interventions for those who are missed by traditional approaches.

8. Networking Among Projects

Cross-national networking should also be encouraged and is more feasible now with the advent of relatively low-cost electronic linkages. Being part of an international project linked to the Center on Families and to IRE's League of Schools Reaching Out added to the enthusiasm and interest of the participants in several of the sites. The researchers reported considerable satisfaction from the international networking which was a necessary part of the project. Most are interested in being involved in more multi-national efforts.

We recommend that opportunities be provided for schools seeking to increase partnerships to communicate with other schools with similar interests and projects. Visitation is especially useful whenever distance and cost will allow for it.

Did the Projects Achieve their Goals?

All of the facilitators considered their projects successful in varying degrees. The biggest gains in most sites were improved communication and relationships between parents and teachers and better feelings by parents about the schools and teachers. Several of the schools reported substantial improvement in school morale and climate, and two noted big gains in academic achievement. One school experienced a large decrease in student drop-outs.

Three sites documented gains in parent ability and confidence to assist their own children's reading and language development at home. Most recorded increased levels of parent involvement in school activities. A few of the sites achieved new arrangements with community institutions or agencies. Both sites that emphasized reading (Melbourne and Lisbon) reported some specific and measurable successes in their at-home approaches, using university students as home visitors. In the case of the Lisbon project, more positive attitudes toward Indian parents, and by the parents toward the school, were recorded.

Working on this study has reinforced the positive view of most of the participants about the importance of exchanging ideas about this developing area of study and practice across national boundaries. The influence of families, communities, and schools on children's learning is universal, and an understanding of the effects of specific interventions can be aided through cross-cultural, cross-national research and exchange.

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